The MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE WEST

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

Frank N. Pennick

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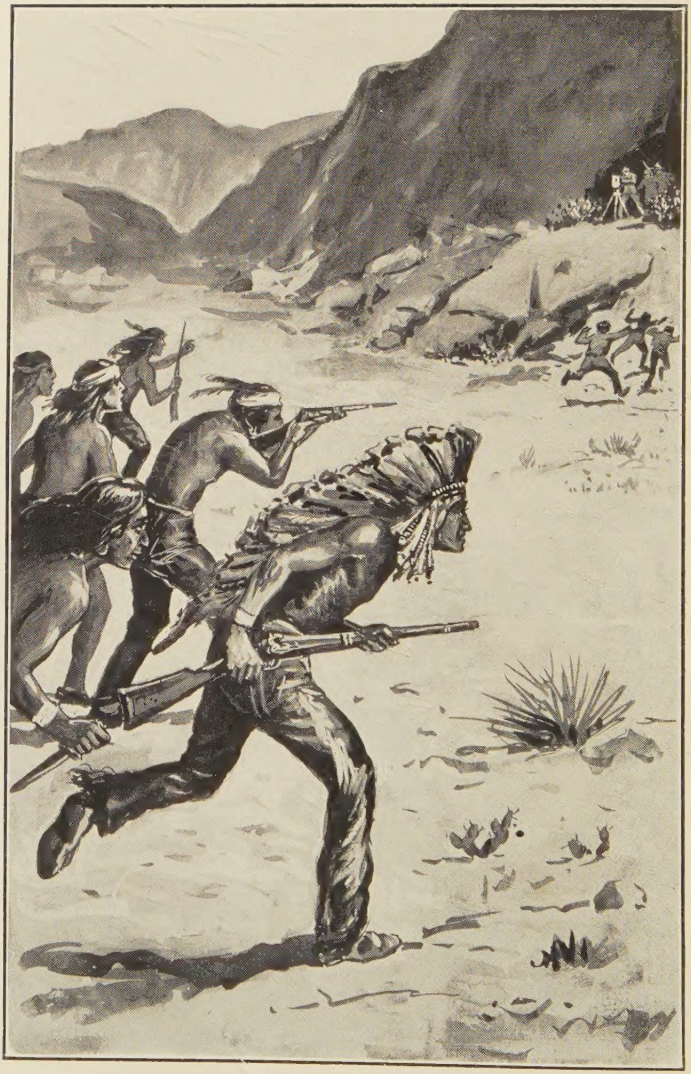

THIS MADE A SPLENDID MOVING PICTURE.—*Page* 202.

The Moving Picture Boys in the West.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE WEST

OR

Taking Scenes Among the Cowboys and Indians

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF "THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS," "THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS ON THE COAST," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTOR CYCLE," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS GREAT SEARCHLIGHT," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

BOOKS BY VICTOR APPLETON

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GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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The Moving Picture Boys in the West

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THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE WEST

CHAPTER I

A CHANCE FOR A PRIZE

"Well, Joe, did you get a good reel?"

"Pretty fair. It was one of those educational affairs, Blake, showing the perils of the city for children—street cars, autos, fire trucks and the like—and how to avoid them."

"Oh, is that what it was?" and the second lad advanced to meet his chum, who was entering the studio, carrying part of a moving picture machine, while behind him came a short, stout youth, with the tripod. "I had an idea, when the order came in, that it might be exciting. They said something about a fire drill."

"Well, that was in it, too. It was a fire drill at a school, showing how quickly the building could be emptied. You see, this society is organ-

ized to keep children out of danger. It's a sort of Safety League, I believe, and they wanted some moving pictures to illustrate their lectures before the pupils; to make the talks more interesting."

"And, as we're in the moving picture business, Joe, it was up to us to get 'em, eh?" and Blake Stewart looked at his chum, Joe Duncan, quizzically.

"That's it, Blake. We'll take anything good that comes along. They are going to pay good money for a seven-hundred-foot film."

"Was it as long as that?"

"Yes. They made the children go through all sorts of stunts, showing the wrong and right ways to get on and off cars, how to look both ways before crossing the street, and what to do in case of fire. The youngsters got a lot of fun out of it, posing for the moving picture camera, and I enjoyed it, too."

"I suppose if our friend C. C. had been along he would have had the school building falling down, or something like that, before the day was over."

"He would have predicted it, anyhow. I wonder how he is? I haven't seen Gloomy Piper in some days."

"Oh, he and the others of the theatrical company are getting ready for some new drama, I

hear. Well, get the reels out of the camera, and we'll send them up to Mr. Hadley to have 'em developed and printed," and the two lads, who had lately gone into the business of taking moving pictures, busied themselves over the camera.

"Here you go, Macaroni," called Blake to Charles Anderson, the stout lad, a little later, the nickname obviously having been bestowed on him in contrast to his fatness. "Take these reels to the Film Theatrical Company, and find out when we can have the positives. And bring back a couple of fresh reels while you're about it."

"Why; anything doing?" asked Joe, as he washed his hands, and went to one of the two desks in the small room the lads had fitted up as an office.

"Not much. I went out and got some street scenes for that Church society, but I didn't use more than five hundred feet. However, I thought I'd have some film on hand in case of emergency. Our stock is running a bit low."

"That's right, Blake. Hello, here's the mail," he added, as the postman knocked on their door, on his rounds through the big office building. "I hope it has a whole lot of orders for us."

"So do I, Joe, though we can't complain since we went into business for ourselves."

"No, that's right. Well, here's a check, any-

how, from that fellow we took some water scenes for last week. He's prompt pay. And here's a bill, too. Wonder if we've got enough in the bank to pay it?"

"I guess so," remarked Blake, half musingly. He was opening a letter which his chum had handed to him from the pile the postman left. "Hum," he went on, "he wants me to come up and see him."

"Who does?" asked Joe, idly ruffling over the rest of the mail.

"My Uncle Jonathan—the one that's in the Old Folks' Home, you know."

"He does, eh? Poor man, I suppose he gets lonesome. Well, why don't you go see him? I wish I had some folks I could go see; or who would even write letters to me."

"Haven't you any, Joe? I know you always said you did not know of one, but I thought maybe it was because you didn't care enough about your distant relatives."

"No, Blake, as far as I know I haven't a living relative. I wish I had."

"Did they all die when you were young?"

"That's what I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No; you see it was this way. I never told

you, nor anybody else for that matter, but I never remember having any real folks."

"Oh, pshaw! You must have had some."

"Well, maybe I did, but the only ones I recall are an old man and woman who took care of me when I was little."

"They must have been your father and mother."

"That's what I thought until I grew big enough to be told different. Then they said I had been left with them by a man who claimed to be my father, and who was to send money for my keep. He did send some for a while, and then he stopped, the old couple said. They couldn't afford to board me for nothing, and they were going to send me to the poorhouse.

"I was just big enough to have some pride—I didn't want to go to the poorhouse, so I ran away, and eventually I got to Fayetteburg, where I got work. The rest you know as well as I do."

"Why, you surprise me, Joe!" exclaimed Blake, as he folded up his uncle's letter. "Where did all this happen?"

"Oh, out West somewhere, I believe. Just where, I can't remember—I was too small."

"But what of your father and mother?"

"I tell you I don't know. I can't even recall my mother, and I have only the faintest recollection

of a man whom I was with before the old couple had me. I've puzzled my brains over it more than once, but that's all the good it has done, and so, of late, I've given it up.

"But whenever I see other folks getting letters from their relatives—well, it always makes me sort of lonesome and homesick," and the lad turned quickly aside, that his chum might not see the moisture in his eyes.

"Well, we'll have to find some relatives for you, Joe. I haven't any too many myself. Uncle Jonathan is the only near one, since my parents died, and he doesn't count for much, though he is a nice old man. Being in the Home makes it so he can't get out to see me. But I'll share him with you if you like."

"Will you, really? That'll be good. And ask him to write to me once in a while."

"I will, and if we can spare time from our moving picture business this Fall we'll run up and see him, Joe. Well, let's look through the rest of the mail. If we could get a couple of nice big orders now they would come in handy."

"That's what. And yet we have plenty of work to keep us busy," replied Joe Duncan. "I'll have to get some of those animal pictures in Bronx Park this week."

"Yes, they ought to make good reels. And Mr.

Hadley said he wanted us to get anything in the way of news we could pick up for his moving picture paper. He always pays well."

"That's so, Blake. But nothing much has happened of late that he hasn't snapped himself. However, we'll be on the lookout. Is there anything else in the mail?"

"I don't think so, and yet—— Hello, what's this? A prize offer for—um—best reel of—um—showing the Indians in—um—dances—rites—ceremonies—um—um——"

"Oh, say, can't you talk United States?" burst out Joe Duncan, looking in some surprise at his chum, who was rapidly reading a letter, half aloud, half to himself, and mumbling between times. "What's it about, anyhow—you're gassing away there about dances and Indians and a prize offer? What's up, anyhow?"

"Say, Joe, if this is real there may be a whole lot up. It will just fit in with what we talked of when we got the reward for capturing the man who collided with Mrs. Randolph."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean about going out West."

"But what has that letter got to do with our going out West?"

"A lot. I'll read it to you—no—it's too long. I'll tell you the main facts. It seems that some of

the Moqui and Navajo Indians have taken French leave from their reservations in Arizona, and are cutting up high jinks on the plains and along the Colorado."

"You mean they've gone on the warpath?"

"No, not exactly that, but they've left the reservations in order to go through some of their queer dance rites and ceremonies that they can't celebrate while the government has charge of them."

"Is that so? But aren't the soldiers after them?"

"Yes, but you know it sometimes takes months to round up all the Indians, once they break away. They hide, and keep hidden, for they haven't forgotten their early habits. And the government doesn't want to do any shooting as long as the redmen only want to keep up their ceremonial dances. So the chances are the Moquis and Navajos will stay out until we get a chance at 'em."

"Until *we* get a chance at 'em? Say, are you crazy, or are you running that reel backward?"

"Neither one; I tell you this is a great chance for us, Joe. A chance to get some dandy pictures and maybe capture the prize."

"What prize?"

"Why, this letter is from some geographical and ethnological society, interested in preserving

facts about this country, and especially the first inhabitants. They want to get some moving pictures of the Indians doing their queer dances, and they suggest, in this letter, that now, since the braves have left their reservations, it will be an excellent opportunity to get views of them, and their ceremonies, before they are driven back. They offer a prize of a thousand dollars for the best thousand-foot reel showing an Indian ceremonial dance, and five hundred dollars additional for shorter reels showing other queer rites."

"By jove, Blake! That is a chance! Shall we take it?"

"I should say yes, Joe. It will cost something, to be sure, but I guess we can stand it. Think of getting out West and seeing life there!"

"Not only that, but watching the Indians in the dances that, maybe, white men never saw before. I tell you it's fine! But how did the society happen to write to us?"

"Oh, this is only one of several letters they have sent out, they say. They picked us because they heard about our work on the moving picture newspaper, and they want some bright and rising young men to tackle this job. Ahem! That's us!" and Blake pretended to swell up his chest.

"Oh, it's us all right, Blake," said Joe, thoughtfully; "and I think we can do it, too. But, if

they've sent out other letters, other moving picture concerns are going to try for the prizes, too; aren't they?"

"Oh, yes; I presume so. But what has that got to do with it?"

"It may have nothing, and yet it may mean a whole lot. Maybe Mr. Hadley would like to try for it."

"He might, and yet I think he'll stick to his moving picture paper that we helped him start. He's making money with that. I don't believe he'll go."

"Well, he may not, Blake; but I think I know one firm that will."

"Which?"

"The one that James Munson is the head of. You remember him, don't you?"

"I should say I did. Our cheerful rival, who knocked you overboard when you tried to photograph the burning ship."

"Yes, and the one who thought we hadn't any right to take a picture of the man who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, just because it was done as a moving picture stunt."

"That's the chap. So you think he may try for the Indian pictures, Joe?"

"I sure do, and if so, Blake, he's likely to make trouble for us."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Blake slowly, as he folded up the letter about the prize offer. "There may be more to this than I first imagined. But I guess——"

Blake was interrupted by the entrance of the stout lad who had been sent out with the exposed films.

"What's up, Macaroni?" asked Joe. "You look excited."

"Mr. Hadley wants to see you two right away!" exclaimed the young assistant. "He's got a big scheme on hand!"

Joe and Blake looked at each other, and then, with one accord, reached for their hats.

CHAPTER II

JOE GETS A LETTER

"WHAT do you imagine he wants, Blake?"

"I don't know, Joe. Maybe he got one of these prize-offer letters, and, as he doesn't want to try for it himself, he's going to turn it over to us."

Thus the two lads speculated while on their way from where they had located their office, to the big structure, partly occupied by Mr. Hadley, and partly by the Film Theatrical Company, for whom they had once worked. The buildings were several blocks apart, and while Joe and Blake are on their way to meet their former employer, I will take just a few moments to tell my new readers something about the lads.

Those who read the first volume of this series, entitled "The Moving Picture Boys," need no introduction to Joe Duncan and Blake Stewart. For the benefit of others I will say that they were each aged about sixteen years, and when the first

story opened they were working on adjoining farms in Fayetteburg, in the central part of New York State.

Blake was employed by his uncle, Jonathan Haverstraw, but this relative was old and feeble, and decided to sell his farm, which was heavily mortgaged, and with what money he thus got, and with a small pension, he planned to retire to an institution for the aged, there to spend the remainder of his days. This would leave Blake without a home.

At the same time Joe Duncan, who was hired boy for a farmer named Zachariah Bradley, was told that his services were no longer needed, because the farmer was too poor to pay him wages any more.

Thus the two lads, who had become good friends and chums, were thrown on their own resources at the same time. Joe, as he had said, had no relatives that he knew of. He had come to Fayetteburg some years before, and had worked for his board and clothes for Mr. Bradley until he got big enough to demand a small wage.

Fate intervened in a strange way to provide both the lads with a means of making a living. The same day that the boys learned that they were to lose their places, a Mr. Calvert Hadley came to Fayetteburg with a troupe of actors and actresses,

to get some moving picture films of a drama they were to produce.

While on their way to the creek to fish the boys saw a lady fall out of a boat. They were about to go to her rescue when they were unexpectedly stopped, and a man leaped in. Then they saw that the "drowning" was only a bit of theatrical work, done to get a moving picture film.

With interest they watched the actor in the guise of a farm hand "rescue" the lady, while Mr. Hadley, on the bank, ground away at the handle of his moving picture camera, thus taking, on a long strip of celluloid film, thousands of views of the animated scene.

The rescue was almost completed when, on the road just across from the creek, a swiftly moving auto crashed into a carriage containing Mrs. Betty Randolph, a rich Southern lady living in Fayetteburg. She was thrown out, but not much injured, though her prize horses were. The autoist speeded away, but not before several views of him had been caught by the moving picture camera.

Mrs. Randolph, who knew Joe and Blake, offered them a substantial reward if they would discover the reckless autoist for her. They agreed to do so, and, a little later, they were asked by Mr. Hadley if they would not like to go to

New York with him, and work at taking moving pictures for a sort of "animated newspaper" he was thinking of starting.

They agreed with eagerness, and thus was solved for them the problem of finding a way to make a living. They arranged to go to the great city, and learn the moving picture business.

How they went to New York, how they were taught to operate the cameras, learning something of the history of the film business, and how pictures are taken, printed and projected on the white screen—all this you may learn about in the first book.

Also how they took views of a big fire, of an elevated railroad wreck, and how they had a glimpse of the reckless autoist whose capture meant several hundred dollars to them.

After taking many views, which were nightly shown to theatrical audiences in the form of an illustrated newspaper, giving the sensational happenings of the day, the boys became quite expert. They snapped a ship on fire in the bay, a man leaping off the Brooklyn Bridge, a diver at work, and many other interesting events.

It was while taking moving pictures of a balloon ascension, and an explosion in mid-air, that the lads had another glimpse of the autoist they wanted.

How they pursued him, caused his arrest, and claimed the reward you will find fully set forth. With the money they purchased some moving picture machines of their own, went into business for themselves, and opened a small office, where they took orders for all sorts of films.

They did well, too, and were prospering, when this story opens. After they had exposed the films, either Mr. Hadley or the Film Theatrical Company developed the negatives, and made as many "positives" as the boys wanted. It is the positives that are shown on the screens, not the negatives, which are the "master-films," so to speak, not being available for projection.

As I have said, when the boys first met Mr. Hadley he was employed by the theatrical company to make views of the various indoor or outdoor dramas enacted. Later he gave up this part of the work for a time to engage in getting views for his moving picture "newspaper," though he still retained an interest in the company.

This latter was composed of Jacob Ringold, the manager; Henry Robertson, who played juvenile leads; Harris Levinberg, the "villain"; Miss Nellie Shay, the leading lady; Birdie Lee, who played the girls' parts; and last, but not least, Christopher Cutler Piper, the comedian.

Mr. Piper, who was generally spoken of as

"C. C.," or "Gloomy," was a character, off as well as on the stage. He never liked to be called Christopher Cutler, because, when a boy, the lads used to call him Christopher "Custard," so he always spoke of himself as C. C.

But his companions often called him "Gloomy" because he was always looking on the dark side of things, and predicting direful happenings that never came to pass. Withal he was a good soul, always ready to do his share to help in any emergency. There were others in the company whom you will meet from time to time.

"Well, if Mr. Hadley happens to be going West to get views of the Indians, we'll just trail along with him, if he'll let us," said Joe, as he and Blake entered the theatrical building.

"Yes, if he'll let us. He's been all over the world, and what he doesn't know about moving pictures wouldn't fill a very big book."

"That's right. But we'll soon know what's up."

The boys entered Mr. Hadley's private office, where, when they were on the moving picture paper, they formerly had their desks.

"Glad to see you, boys!" the photographer exclaimed, as he shook hands with them. "I told Macaroni to tell you to come down as soon as you

could. I wanted to be the first to make you the offer."

"We've already heard about it," said Blake, with a smile.

"You have?" exclaimed Mr. Hadley, in surprise. "I don't see how you could, as only half an hour ago Mr. Ringold decided to take his company to the West. As soon as I learned of it I said, right away: 'I want those boys to go along.' And how did you hear of it?"

"Say, you're off, Blake!" exclaimed his chum.

"I guess I am," admitted the other. "I thought you were going to tell us about the geographical society's prize offer for pictures of the Moquis and Navajos doing their ceremonial dances," Blake went on. "We have decided to go in for that, and I supposed this was what you had reference to when you sent for us."

"No," said Mr. Hadley, slowly. "This is the first I knew about the prize offer, though it sounds good. But this is what Mr. Ringold is going to do. He is going to make a series of Western dramas for moving pictures. In order to get the true background, he is going to take his entire company out West, to be gone until late this Fall. He wants me to go along to make most of the views, and I have agreed. I can't forget what

excellent service you rendered me, and so I want you to come along. Will you?"

"But we had about decided on getting some views of these Indians," said Joe.

"If we succeed it may mean a couple of thousand dollars for us in prizes," put in Blake. "And we calculated that we could get enough other views to pay our expenses."

"That's all right!" exclaimed Mr. Hadley, after a moment's thought. "There's no reason why you can't do both. Let's see—those Indian reservations are in Arizona, aren't they?"

"Yes," replied Joe.

"Well, the theatrical company is going to be there part of the time, and I guess you can get enough days off from making dramatic snap-shots to go into the desert and photograph the Indians. In that way you'll be sure of your expenses, and good pay from Mr. Ringold, and at the same time have a chance at the prizes. How about it?"

Joe looked at Blake, who returned his gaze.

"It's a go!" cried Blake.

"It sure is," asserted his chum. "And now we don't care whether our rivals try to get ahead of us or not; do we, Blake?"

"Your rivals?" questioned Mr. Hadley.

"Yes—Jim Munson and his crowd. Most likely he'll try for the prize."

"I presume so," agreed the photographer.

"But we'll beat him!" cried Blake. "We beat him at the moving picture newspaper game, and we will at this Indian business; won't we, Joe?"

"We'll make a big try, anyhow. If he and his crowd get to Arizona they——"

"Hush!" suddenly exclaimed Joe, who was seated near the partly opened office door.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake, curiously.

"There's one of Munson's photographers now, in the hall," was the answer. "He was on the tug the time they rammed us and I went overboard."

"What's he doing here?" asked Blake, lowering his voice.

"Oh, he's dickering for a second-hand machine Mr. Ringold has for sale," explained Mr. Hadley. "He's been in here several times, but I don't pay any attention to him. Now that I think of it, though, probably that's why he wants this particular camera. It's adapted especially for work in hot countries. Boys, I believe he is going to give you a run on those Indian pictures."

"We'll meet him half way," declared Blake.

"Well, now that you've agreed to go with us, let's arrange details, boys. Oh, by the way, Joe, here's a letter that came for you to-day," said the photographer, producing a rather dirty envelope.

"I was going to re-address it to your office, but when this thing came up I decided to hold it until you came."

"A letter?" repeated Joe, wonderingly. "I can't imagine who it can be from," and he looked curiously at Blake, recalling their conversation a little while before about relatives.

"Better open it and find out," suggested his chum, as Joe turned the letter over and over.

CHAPTER III

STRANGE NEWS

"WHO in the world can be writing to me?" murmured Joe, several times.

"Why don't you open it?" insisted Blake, half smiling, for Joe acted as if he had never before received a letter, although, as a matter of fact, fully half the business mail came to him to open.

"Say, is this some joke you're trying on me?" he asked of Blake, suspiciously.

"Indeed not!" exclaimed his chum.

"That note looks as if it had traveled some," commented Mr. Hadley. "It's half out of the envelope. It won't take much to open it."

"The postmark is so faint I can't read it," went on Joe, doing as many persons before him have done and probably will do afterward—trying to guess the source of a letter from the postmark. "And yet," the lad went on, "it looks as if the bottom part of it spelled 'Ariz.' I wonder——"

"Arizona, of course!" exclaimed Blake, with a

laugh. "Maybe it's from some of those Indians who have broken loose, asking you to come out and see them."

But Joe was not listening to his chum's banter. He was taking out the letter. The missive itself was not any more inviting than the envelope had been. The screed seemed to be written on a piece of wrapping paper, with a lead pencil, and on some soft and yielding surface, for the marks of the pencil showed on the reverse side. It did not take Joe long to read the letter, misspelled as it was.

"Listen to this!" he cried. "It beats me!" and he proceeded to read the communication, which ran as follows:

"Deer Sur I red in a book—wich we aint got manny out in this fersaken country—that you was alive and taken pictures that move—wich I saw some onct in Tucson. I knowed onct a feller of your same name and I wuz wonderin if you an him was anny relativeness. He mentioned to me that his brother had a boy named joe duncan an would like fer to find him. I might put you next to that feller—I mean the one what was talkin to me if you ever git out this way. Them movin picture fellers go all over I hearn tell. If you do come out here let me no. I'll give a good time an so will the boys of Big B ranch. Yours as ever sam houston reed,"

For a moment there was silence in the office, and then Blake burst out with:

"What does it mean?"

"That's what I'd like to know," spoke Joe,

breathing uneasily at the slender clue that had come to him of a possible relative.

"I can't make head or tail of it," announced Blake, as he reached for the letter and read it quickly. "Why, it isn't even dated, and there's no way of telling where it came from."

"It came from Arizona, that's sure," declared Mr. Hadley, quietly.

"What makes you think so?" asked Blake.

"Because the writer speaks of Tucson, and that's in Arizona. But I can't exactly understand what Mr. Reed means by Joe's relations."

"Mr. Reed?" queried Joe.

"Yes, that's the man's name who wrote this, though he doesn't use capitals. 'Sam Houston Reed' is his name, and he must have come from Texas originally, for he's named after old Sam Houston. But have you any relatives out in Arizona, Joe?"

"Not that I know of. I haven't any folks anywhere. I only wish I had. But this is strange news to me. I wonder if there can be anything in this? It's all so indefinite. Of course, Joe Duncan isn't an uncommon name, and yet if a man did have a son named that—I wonder if I could be that boy? Oh, if it should prove true!"

"Go slow," advised Blake. "There's something queer about this. It can't be a joke, even if the

man who wrote it forgot to tell where he was from. A nice thing to do, inviting you out to see him, and not telling you where it is he's located!"

"It must be on some cattle place," spoke Mr. Hadley; "for he speaks of the Big B ranch. It might be possible to trace it that way."

"And I'm going to try!" cried Joe. "Isn't it the luckiest thing in the world that I'm going to Arizona? Fate just made this match-up! I'm sure the letter's from Arizona now."

"Let me have it," suggested Mr. Hadley. "I'll look at the postmark through this big reading glass and magnify it. Then it will show up plainer."

He bent over the much worn envelope and finally announced:

"It's Arizona all right, though just what place I can't say, as that name is almost rubbed off. I can't even be sure of one letter. But the 'Ariz' is plain enough. I'll tell you what we'll do—we'll photograph it."

"What good will that amount to?" asked Joe.

"Why, often, in faded documents, the camera will bring out, after a long exposure, words and letters totally invisible to the naked eye. I often did that before I went into the moving picture business. Yes, I'll give this a long exposure, and we'll see what happens."

"Here's another funny thing," went on Joe. "He says he sees by a book that I am alive. What can he mean by that—what book was I ever in—and why should he think I was dead?"

"I think I can answer the 'book' part of it," spoke Mr. Hadley. "The writer probably means a magazine. You know the pictures of you two lads were in one of the film industry periodicals some time ago, telling of your work on my newspaper. Don't you remember?"

"That's right!" exclaimed Blake. "We were written up for the magazine."

"And one of them probably drifted out to Arizona," went on Mr. Hadley. "Mr. Reed speaks of it as a book. But what he means by saying he sees that you're still alive is beyond me."

"I think that can be explained," suggested Blake. "If you had heard of a person, and then, for years, lost track of him, naturally, on again reading, or hearing of him, you'd say: 'Well, I see he's still alive.'"

"That's it!" cried Joe.

"This Mr. Reed must know something about Joe," proceeded Blake. "He says a man of his acquaintance had a brother who had a son named Joe Duncan. Oh, if he should prove to be your father, Joe!"

"I don't see how it can be," spoke the other,

shaking his head dubiously. "And yet, oh! how I wish it would prove true! I'm going to try to find out all I can, but it looks rather hopeless. I sure would like to find Mr. Reed of the Big B ranch, and his cowboys, too."

"Maybe we'll run across them when making views of some of our dramas," suggested the photographer. "We are going to work in some cowboys and Indians, I believe."

"Good!" exclaimed Blake.

"This fellow must have gotten the address of the moving picture newspaper from the magazine," went on Joe, who could not seem to get over the strange news that had so unexpectedly come to him. "He sent the letter here."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Hadley. "Well, I'll arrange to photograph the envelope, and if I get any results I'll let you know. Now about going out West with us. Let's talk over our plans."

"Yes, and we must see the geographical society people, too," went on Blake; "and make some arrangements with them. If we're going to try for the prize we want to be properly entered. I have an idea that one of those new automatic moving picture cameras, worked by compressed air, would be a great thing to take——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Joe quickly. "Here comes

that Munson man again—Jake Black his name is. And he's got part of a camera with him!"

"Has he?" exclaimed Mr. Hadley, peering out into the hall, along which the man was walking. "So he has, and it's that one especially adapted for work in hot and dry climates. Pshaw! I was going to suggest that you boys take that for your Indian pictures. But if Mr. Ringold has sold it, why, it's too late. Let's go see him, anyhow. I want to tell him you boys are going with us."

CHAPTER IV

IN GRAVE PERIL

"Sorry, boys, but I just let that special camera go," said Mr. Ringold, head of the theatrical company, a little later, when Blake, Joe and Mr. Hadley called on him. "I had no use for it, and, though Munson and his crowd are rivals, in a way, I couldn't turn a good offer down. And I didn't see how they could use it to my disadvantage. Sorry."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," said the photographer. "But aren't you glad the boys are coming with us?"

"Indeed I am," was the prompt answer. "We need good workers. I'm going to turn out the finest line of Western moving picture plays ever thrown on a screen!" and the theatrical man looked boastfully around. Like all of his kind, he was not above advertising himself.

"Humph! You may get some good views, if the sun doesn't kill us all, and melt the films," said a drawling voice outside the private office.

"I don't need a directory to tell me that's C. C.!" exclaimed Blake, with a laugh.

"Yes, Gloomy is on the job," came from Mr. Hadley, while the theatrical man called out:

"Come in, Christopher Cutler Piper."

"Not that name—please—I ask you not!" exclaimed the comedian in his best "Dutch" manner. "Call me C. C. unceasingly, and on the high seas, but not—not—the other—I ask of you!" and he pretended to weep, while the boys laughed outright.

"We're arranging details of our Western trip," went on Mr. Ringold. "I hope you won't forget how to be funny when you see an Indian coming at you with a scalping knife, and a cowboy makes you ride a bucking bronco."

"Oh, no, not at all!" exclaimed Mr. Piper. "I shall sing my death song in ragtime when I'm scalped. I've got a new idea for some verses—how would 'The Cowboy Rag' go—with pistol shots in between?"

"Great!" exclaimed the manager. "Work it up, C. C."

"I'm sorry about that camera," went on Mr. Hadley, when they had discussed some details of the trip. "It rather looks as if Munson and his crowd intended to go after that Indian stunt, boys. Arizona is hot and dry."

"What Indian stunt is that?" asked Mr. Ringold, for he had been so engrossed in his own affairs that no chance had yet occurred to tell him about the prize offer.

"Oh, don't let that worry you," he went on, when it was explained that rivalry was feared. "You got the best of Munson and his men several times, boys, and you can do it again, I'm sure. But speaking of cameras, there's a new one on the market that works automatically. That is, once it's started it reels off the film until it has all been exposed.

"It works by a little compressed air motor inside, and you can store enough air in the reservoir with a bicycle pump to run off a thousand feet of film. I'd get one of them if I were you."

"We were speaking about it," said Joe. "But do you think we'll have time to make a try for the Indian pictures, and also get moving views of your dramas?"

"Oh, we'll arrange things so you can," promised the theatrical man. "Now, how soon can you boys go?"

"Well, we have a few orders on hand that we will have to fill," said Blake; "and then we want to fix things so we can take up our business again when we come back. It's too good to lose."

"I think I can get a man to look after your

interests while you're gone," said Mr. Hadley. "In fact I'll have to give up personal work on my moving picture newspaper for the time being. But I'm going to leave it in good hands. I'll arrange your affairs at the same time, if you like."

"Then you can leave soon," suggested Mr. Ringold. "We are about finished with our New York work, and I want to keep my theatrical company busy."

"Yes—too busy," murmured C. C. "You'd work us to death if you had your way."

"Cheerful companion—isn't he?" laughed Mr. Ringold. "Well, if this is settled I'll leave the details to you, Mr. Hadley. Only get us all to the West as soon as you can."

"Probably there'll be a railroad collision on the way," said C. C., gloomily. "I never saw such a world!" and he went off whistling a merry air.

"Well, we'd better be getting back to our office," suggested Blake to Joe, a little later. "We've got some matters to look after, and Macaroni isn't quite capable of them, as yet."

"Go ahead," assented Mr. Hadley. "I'll look you up later, and I'll see about that automatic camera for you. It might be just what you need to get pictures of the Indians in some of their queer dances, when they won't allow any one to be present. You can hide the machine behind

some bushes, set it to go off at a certain time, and the motor will do the rest."

"Fine!" cried Blake.

On arrival at their office the boys found Macaroni somewhat excited.

"They've been telephoning three or four times for you!" he exclaimed. "Get 'em on the wire right away."

"Who?" asked Joe, wondering if it could have anything to do with his mysterious letter.

"The Board of Education. They want you to get 'em a reel of film showing ice cutting."

"Ice cutting this time of year!" cried Blake. "With the thermometer around eighty. What's the matter, Macaroni?"

"I meant ice making, not cutting," explained the stout assistant. "The educational people want the film for one of the popular lectures. They want you to call 'em up."

"Then I'd better do it, and get it straightened out," decided Blake. He soon had the Board of Education on the wire, and the head of the department for providing popular lectures for the people explained what was wanted.

"We want to show how ice is made," he said. "Can you go to some artificial ice-making plant, and picture the process from start to finish?"

"I think so," replied Blake, mentally going

over the necessary details. "Yes, I think we can get that film for you by to-night."

"Good! I'd like to have it, as one of our lecturers disappointed us, and we've got to have a substitute in a hurry. Your firm is a hustling one, young man."

"We learned our trade on a moving picture newspaper, so that explains it," 'phoned back Blake. "We'll look after it for you. Good-by."

"Much to do?" asked Joe.

"Well, we've got to do a little hustling, but I think we can make it. We'll get right up to one of the big ice-making plants. I guess they'll let us do the job when they know what it's for. Get the cameras ready, and I'll cancel some of these smaller orders for the day."

The firm the boys had established was a sort of free-lance affair, doing all sorts of work for various customers. They were gradually building up a fine business, because of their willingness to oblige, and their promptness.

A little later the two, with Macaroni to help them carry their extra reels and other accessories, were at the ice-making plant. The manager readily agreed to allow them to make moving pictures of the various processes.

They were first shown through the plant, and got a general idea of what views they wanted.

Then the workmen were told to do whatever the photographers asked, and to pose when necessary. As the firm's name would be used on the moving picture screen, it would be a good advertisement for them.

First some views were made in the engine-room, where the big machines for pumping the ammonia in liquid and gaseous form through the miles of pipes were photographed, the silent giant of steel, with its beating pistons and whirring wheels, making a fine series of pictures.

From there the boys went to the cold storage rooms, for, in addition to making ice, this firm maintained a cold storage warehouse, and views were taken of thousands of tubs of butter, literally millions of eggs; tons of fresh meat, fish, game and all sorts of provisions, in fact, kept sweet by means of pipes running around the wall. The pipes contained liquid ammonia, constantly circulating, and this has the property of drawing much of the heat from the atmosphere, so much so that the pipes were covered with a thick coating of snow, and in some places ice. All this was pictured.

The views where the ice was actually made were, however, to be the best, Joe and Blake thought. The boys were led into a big room, the floor of which consisted of hundreds of small

tanks, just the shape of a cake of ice which weighs about three hundred pounds.

By means of ammonia pipes running around these small tanks, the water in them is cooled to the freezing point. It becomes a solid cake and tank and all is lifted out. The tank is then dipped for a moment into a vat of boiling water, which melts the ice cake just enough so that it slides out of the metal tank to be put into storage, or loaded into a wagon for delivery.

"This will make a dandy film!" exclaimed Blake, who was grinding away at the handle of his camera, while all about was the steam arising from the difference in temperature of the atmosphere and the ice cakes.

"Yes," agreed Joe. "It looks like the North Pole."

"Maybe you'll wish you were back here when you're out on the hot Arizona desert!" said Macaroni.

"Oh, don't be imitating C. C.," laughed Blake. "Though I wish we could take one of these big cakes along for a souvenir."

The men were busy lifting out the frozen tanks, and putting others in the holes in the floor to be frozen, when there suddenly sounded through the room a dull explosion. At the same

time the boys, and all the men in the place, seemed to be gasping for breath.

"What—what is it?" faltered Joe.

"I don't know—" began Blake; and then in another second, as a sharp pain shot through him, he did know. "An ammonia tank has burst!" he cried. "We've got to get out of here!"

CHAPTER V

PREPARATIONS

CHOKING and gasping, unable to get a full breath in that acrid atmosphere filled with ammonia gas, the moving picture boys looked at each other in alarm. Blake, who had been working the camera, faltered. His arm dropped to his side.

"Look out!" yelled the stout assistant. "Blake's going to topple——"

But that was as far as he got. Like an inert mass poor Macaroni dropped to the floor of the ice-room. Like some mass of fog the thick ammonia gas drifted into the apartment.

"I—I—can't—" faltered Joe, and then he, too, staggered back and crumpled up in a heap. Blake was fighting to retain his senses, but he felt that they were fast leaving him.

A wall of black seemed to loom up in front of him. He was dimly aware that he was falling, and it seemed to be into some bottomless pit. His one thought was of the camera, and

he reached out toward it, under the impression that he could save it from damage.

He heard confused shouts, and was aware that a bell was clanging somewhere. At first he thought it was in his own brain, but a little later he heard some one call "Fire!"

"It's an alarm—they're sending in an alarm!" cried Blake. At least he thought he shouted, but it was only the faintest whisper. His brain thought rapidly. Here was a fine chance to get a realistic accident scene—a reel of film that would make fine pictures, but he was unable to operate his camera. He could not even stand, though he tried desperately hard to do so. Then he had to give in to that sense of falling, and he felt himself go down heavily, while the ringing of the bell and the shouts increased.

* * * * * * * *

"They're all right now."

"Yes, they're coming out of it well. Not hurt a bit."

"Plucky lads, I call 'em, to stay there when all the others ran."

"That's right. I've seen these two before, taking pictures at some of the big fires."

"Yes, and this one I remember helping down a scaling ladder once when we had that big tenement-house fire last year."

Blake, opening his eyes, wondered where the voices came from. He looked to one side, and saw Joe reclining on some horse blankets spread on a grass plot.

"Well, we're out of the place, anyhow," thought Blake, as he glanced to the other side and saw Charlie Anderson, his stout helper, likewise stretched out. "I wonder how it happened, and if they're alive?"

"How do you feel?" a voice asked, and, glancing up, Blake observed a number of firemen and helpers of the ice plant gathered around.

"I—I guess I'm all right," replied the lad. "How about the others? Are Joe and Charlie——?"

"I guess you'll find they're all right, too," said one of the firemen, and, as he spoke, Joe began to get up. He looked about as though dazed, and a little later Macaroni arose. Blake found that he was able to stand, and, aside from a dizzy feeling, and a smarting in his eyes and throat, he experienced no ill effects from the accident.

"How did it happen?" he asked. "How did we get out?"

"An ammonia tank burst," said the foreman of the plant, who had been showing them around. "One of the smaller ones, fortunately. It has happened before, and an alarm of fire was turned

in by someone, though there was really no blaze. But the firemen came, and, as they have had experiences here before with our ammonia, they knew what to do."

"That's right!" exclaimed one of the "smoke-eaters," standing near Blake, and the lad noticed that the man held a peculiar helmet in his hand. "When we got the signal from the private box of the ice plant," he went on, "we knew enough to prepare for trouble, and we brought the new smoke helmets that would protect us from the ammonia fumes."

"And did you carry us out?" asked Joe, while Blake looked around on the assembled firemen and employes of the plant.

"Yes, we all had a hand in the rescues," answered the firemen, and Blake recognized him as the one who had come up on scaling ladders to save him at the time of the big tenement fire, of which I have written in the previous book of this series. "There were a number of men in the room where the tank burst, who couldn't help themselves any more than you lads could," he concluded. "A little more fresh air, and you'll be all right."

"What about my camera?" asked Blake.

"That's all right," replied the fireman who had

carried him out. "I went back after it when I had you safe. I knew you would want that."

"We do," spoke Joe. "I hope the films aren't spoiled."

"I worked the handle as long as I could," Blake explained; "and then I had to keel over. But say, Joe, if the machine is all right, why can't we go right on taking pictures, and incorporate one of the rooms where the explosion took place?"

"I'm game if you are," declared his chum.

"I guess they're both plucky," murmured the fireman. "Well," he said to the superintendent of the plant, "I guess you don't need us any more, so we'll report back to quarters."

"All right," was the answer. Then the superintendent added to the moving picture boys: "If you want to go on taking views you may. The burst tank will show the public some of the dangers of this business, though this time, fortunately, none of our men was seriously hurt, even though some will have to knock off for a few days."

When the firemen had left, and the excitement had calmed down, work at the ice plant was resumed. The fumes of the ammonia had nearly all been blown away by this time, and Joe and Blake could go back into the tank-room. The lads

soon recovered from the effects of the fumes, and though a few feet of film were spoiled by the displacement of the camera when Blake tried to turn the handle as he was fainting, the reel was not all damaged.

After finishing the scenes where the ice was actually made, some views were taken of loading the frozen cakes into wagons, and sending them to the consumers.

"Now for the place where the tank burst!" exclaimed Blake, and the foreman led them to the room. There was quite a scene of devastation, though the explosion was confined to a small section of the plant, and did not stop its working. Men were busy clearing away the debris when the lads appeared, and they were about to stop, when Blake said:

"No, keep right on working. This is a moving picture, and we want some action in it. I guess the Board of Education will like this."

In a short time he had secured all the photographs he wanted, and he and his chum, with their stout assistant, hurried off with the films, to have them developed and printed.

"We've got to hustle," said Joe. "That accident delayed us."

"Yes; lucky it was no worse," spoke Blake. "Do you feel all right?"

"Oh, sure. It soon passed over. How about you?"

"Pretty fair—a little headache, that's all."

The film of the ice plant was ready on time, however, for Mr. Hadley, when he heard what trouble the boys had had, gave it his personal attention, and produced good and quick results.

The next few days the boys were kept busy filling some orders they had on hand, and arranging to have their business looked after while they were in the West. This last was not so easy as they had anticipated, though with the help of Mr. Hadley it was eventually brought about.

Meanwhile Mr. Ringold was preparing to take his entire theatrical company out to the land of the Indians and cowboys, and this was no small matter.

"Now we've got to make some arrangments with that geographical society that wants those Indian pictures," said Blake one day, about a week after the ice plant explosion.

"That's right," agreed Joe. "They were kind enough to bring the matter to our attention, and we ought to learn just what kind of views they want. I'd like to pull down that thousand-dollar prize."

"So would I—and some of the five-hundred-

dollar ones, too. And I suppose Munson and his crowd are after the same thing."

"I suppose so—but I haven't seen or heard anything of them lately," said Joe.

"Neither have I, but they'll be after us sooner or later, and we'll have to be on the watch. Are we going to take Macaroni with us out West?"

"I think so. We'll need some one to help us, and he is better than breaking in a new lad. It'll cost us something, though, Blake; but I think it's worth it."

"So do I. We can't afford to take chances in not getting good films if we go that far for 'em. And I do hope I can run across that man who wrote me the letter. I wish I had his address so I could write back to him. But I guess I'll just have to wait until we get out West."

A conference with one of the representatives of the geographical society gave the boys what information they needed.

"We want the pictures to be as natural as possible," said Mr. Hedden, for the society. "Get the Indians doing all sorts of odd dances, and going through their ceremonies. If you can manage to snap them when they don't know it, do so."

"That's where our automatic camera will come in fine," declared Joe.

"I wonder if they'll stay on the rampage until we get there?" spoke Blake.

"Yes," said Mr. Hedden. "I have been in communication with the government agents out there, and they say while they want to get the Indians back on the reservation, they are going to use gentle means, and will not hurry them. The redmen are likely to be out until late Fall. The cold weather will drive them back."

"Then if they're there we'll get the films," declared Joe, earnestly.

"That's what Mr. Munson said," remarked Mr. Hedden.

CHAPTER VI

FILMING A PLAY

For a moment Joe and Blake stared at the manager of the geographical society.

"Mr. Munson?" repeated Blake, somewhat in a daze.

"Yes. He has a moving picture outfit, I believe, and he is going to try for the prize. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, we've had some dealings with him," replied Joe, not saying exactly what the "dealings" were. "And we rather supposed that he would be after these Indian pictures."

"But it was a sort of shock to hear it definitely," added Blake. "We were hoping that our rivals would not get after us."

"Well, we thought it best to have several concerns try for the pictures," explained Mr. Hedden.

"Oh, yes, that's right!" exclaimed Blake. "We're not objecting. In fact, perhaps it is a

good thing that we are going to have competition, for it will make us do better work."

"You see, the society could not afford to take chances on not getting the views, which might be the case if only one firm went after the films," went on Mr. Hedden. "The American Indians are rapidly passing away, with their strange rites and ceremonies and dances. We want to preserve them for posterity, and the only way we can do this is by means of moving pictures. It is simply an educational matter with us. We are not concerned with trade rivalry.

"Just as when we wanted to preserve some of the Indian Folk songs, and we had the airs sung for phonograph records, we sent out several representatives. And, by the way, we shall probably do that in this case, for we want to have some of the dance chants to accompany the pictures. So you may meet phonograph men out there."

"I can see that we're going to have a pretty lively time, Blake," remarked Joe as they left the rooms of the society, having partly made their final arrangements. "What with stacking up against Munson, and perhaps having to get our pictures sort of in tune, and time, with the phonograph people, we're going to be some busy."

"That's right—to say nothing of locating the

mysterious Mr. Reed of the Big B ranch, and finding your relatives."

"Blake, do you really think I've got any?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit, old man. And I'm going to do my best to help you locate 'em. Yes, we sure are going to be kept busy. Come on over to the studio, now; I want to have a talk with Mr. Hadley."

When the boys reached the place where the theatrical company held forth they found a busy scene being enacted—in fact, several of them.

"This is our rush day," said Mr. Hadley, who was hurrying here and there with his cameras, reels of film, typewritten lists of directions, and so on.

"What's up?" asked Joe.

"We're filming some last plays that the company is giving in the East," was the answer. "This will close up the business here for the time being, and, as you know, the next play will be enacted in the West, where you boys will have to get busy. We'll film our plays out there after to-day."

I might explain that "filming a play" means to take photographs—moving pictures—of the various acts, either indoors, or out, as the action

of the drama calls for. To "film" is the technical word for making the pictures.

Joe and Blake had been kept so busy since they entered the moving picture business, at their regular work of making reels for Mr. Hadley's "newspaper," and later, in doing outdoor or educational films for their customers, that they had had few chances of seeing a play filmed from start to finish. And as I intend this series of books to be more or less instructive, I shall describe, in brief, what the lads saw.

"What's the first thing to do in making a moving picture play?" asked Joe of Mr. Hadley, when the latter had a momentary breathing spell.

"It's like making a rabbit stew," said the photographer. "The first thing the directions call for is the rabbit, or, in this case, for the scenario, or plot, of the play. This is written out by the manager of the company, or one may come to him, unsolicited, from the big array of people who are writing picture plays for a living. And I think, by the manner in which the manuscripts pour in here on some days," added the photographer, "that nearly everybody in the country has stopped writing short stories, verses and novels, and has taken to the photoplay. If you boys ever try your hand at it, first learn a few simple rules."

"Such as what?" asked Blake. "Not that I

intend to write a play, though," he hastened to add.

"Well, first be sure you have a good plot, and one which does not call for impossible situations. Railroad collisions are hard to arrange for off-hand, and they cost a lot. So does sinking a steamer, though, as you know, some of our big American companies, like Mr. Edison's, do actually create an illusion of realism by as daring a task as making two locomotives collide, even blowing up big buildings, built for the purpose, to show an explosion, when the action in the drama calls for one."

"Is that so?" asked Joe, somewhat doubtfully.

"It certainly is," replied Mr. Hadley. "Why, one concern, that wanted to dramatize an Indian story, sent a company of actors and actresses out West. The story called for the burning of a small town by the Indians. This concern actually bought outright the houses in a small settlement, and had a band of Indians, hired for the purpose, really set fire to the buildings, so that the scene might be real.

"Another concern bought a small steamer, loaded it with dynamite, sent it out some distance from land, and at the proper time it was blown up to fill a certain place in the film story. Of course, those are exceptional cases. But we

expect to do some stunts ourselves when we get in the West. I guess they're ready to start now."

The stage was set for a domestic drama. As the action had to take place in a comparatively restricted space, only part of the big stage was in use for this particular play. And, as I have explained, on the same "stage" as many as three plays may be going on, and photographed at the same time. The limits of each one are marked out by small sticks, laid on the floor, and the actors and actresses must keep within the limits of their particular sticks, for the camera does not show anything beyond.

As the play was a new one, some rehearsing was in order. While this was going on Mr. Hadley explained to the boys that sometimes the drama was sketched out, each character receiving his or her part as in a regular play. Sometimes the conversations were given in full, with the stage directions, and again the stage manager alone knew what was to take place, he having a mere skeleton of the plot, and calling on each character to do this or that as wanted, and as he judged it should be done.

Overhead were many powerful electric lights, to bring out the pictures with great clearness. Joe and Blake noticed that the actors and actresses were not "made up"—that is, they did not paint

as they would have done if on a footlighted stage. They merely whitened their faces, and it was noticed that the real characters called for were actually present. That is, a young man was not made up as an old one. If an old man was required an aged actor had to play that part.

The reason for that, and for whitening instead of "making up" the faces, is because the enormous enlargement which takes place when the picture is thrown on the screen brings out every small defect. Wigs and false beards almost always show, sometimes with ludicrous effect, and paint is very noticeable. But white powder serves to make the face more distinct, and every detail of expression can be noticed. It also makes a good contrast where the pictures are not shown in colors.

"All ready!" called the stage manager, when he had put the actors and actresses through a lengthy rehearsal. "We'll try it now. Are you ready, Mr. Hadley?"

"Yes," answered the photographer, wheeling his moving picture camera into position.

"Now we'll try the time before filming," went on Mr. Ringold. "Start her off!"

Thereupon the characters went through that particular scene. It took place in a parlor, when a servant brings in a letter to the master of the house, who reads the screed, and shows great sur-

prise. Then his daughter enters, to whom is shown the letter, at which she bursts into tears.

This little scene was gone through with to the great interest of Blake and Joe.

"How much?" asked Mr. Ringold of Mr. Hadley.

"It took sixty-five seconds."

"Far too long," was the manager's comment. "We've got to get down to forty seconds, at least. There's more action in the rest of the play, and we can give that part more time. Now do that quicker!"

I have already explained in the previous book, that moving pictures are best taken at the rate of sixteen per second, and screened at the same rate. Neither slower nor faster will give good results, and so to get quicker action the actors must themselves work quicker—the camera cannot be hastened.

Under Mr. Ringold's directions the little rehearsal was gone over again, until it took just the right time.

"Now get it!" ordered the manager, and this time when the characters went through with their parts the moving picture camera began to click and buzz.

At once there was seeming confusion, but in reality it was all as smooth as clockwork. The

characters were speaking their lines, and at the same time Mr. Ringold was shouting his stage directions.

"Come in quicker! Don't stand that way. That's better. Now cry as if you really felt bad!"

All seemed to go well for a few seconds.

"Shut the door as if you meant it!" came the command a little later. "Act naturally. Shout your lines. The audience wants to see your lips move!"

A little later on in the play came this:

"Look happy! You've just been left a fortune, and you ought to smile!"

"I guess that's C. C.," murmured Joe.

"That's right," replied his chum, Joe's attention having been drawn away from the scene for a moment. "C. C. is getting gloomier every day."

"Be lively!" again came from the stage manager. "Don't be so slow. Get some expression into your faces. Open your eyes more. That's better!"

The play seemed to go along smoothly for a time, Mr. Hadley being at the machine, whose buzzing and purring rose in a hum above the voices of the actors.

It was at a critical moment. The heroine was

just about to topple backward in a pretended faint when Mr. Hadley suddenly cried:

"Stop!"

"Catch her and hold her there!" came the quick command of Mr. Ringold, and one of the stage hands leaped forward and caught the swaying actress, while the picture machine ceased working.

CHAPTER VII

OFF FOR THE WEST

"WHAT'S the matter?" asked Blake.

"Did something happen?" came from Joe.

It certainly seemed so, with the whole company of actors standing in strained positions, as if suddenly petrified, while the stage hand held the lady in a sort of slanting position, as though she had begun to faint and had repented of it.

"Film run out?" asked Mr. Ringold.

"That's it," replied the photographer. "I thought there was more on that reel. Something must be the matter with the register. I'll have a fresh reel in, though, in a few seconds."

I might explain that on each moving picture camera there is a device that registers how many feet of film have been run out for any particular scene. It is something like a speedometer on an auto telling the number of miles traveled. In this case Mr. Hadley, looking at the register, had thought there was still several more feet of the

celluloid film to be exposed; when, as a matter of fact, he was at the end of his reel. So he had cried "stop" as a signal to the actors, for it would have been useless to go on with the scene with no film to record it.

"It would be almost impossible to get the characters into the same positions as they occupied on the old film, if I exposed a new one without holding them there," explained Mr. Hadley to the boys, as he was rapidly putting in a fresh reel. "So I prefer to have them stand perfectly still, even if some of them have to be held up," he went on. "Then I can go on from where I had to stop without a break."

"But won't the break show when you join this film on to the other?" asked Joe.

"No, I'll start the machine now, and cut out the first few pictures on the new film, which would show the characters resuming their parts," explained the photographer. "Then I'll cement the two films together, and I defy any one to tell where the break occurred."

"Go!" he called a moment later, and the stage hand rushed off, allowing the lady to sink back in a graceful faint. The clicking of the camera told that the act had been registered, and the other characters resumed their business where they had left off. Later the boys saw the film

projected, and, had they not witnessed the actual happening, they could never had told that anything unusual had occurred.

The play went on, the boys watching interestedly. The actors and actresses spoke their lines, though of course the audience would never hear them. But the movement of the lips could be seen, and, as you have been to moving picture theatres, you can testify that it is often possible to tell exactly what was said by watching the movement of the lips.

"And besides," said Mr. Ringold, in talking to the boys about this rather odd feature of the business; "even if the audience can't hear the words, the saying helps the actor to properly conduct himself, and make the appropriate gestures that go with the particular thing he is doing."

"Well," remarked Mr. Hadley, as he finished the last act, "this will end the business here, I guess. When do we start for the West, Mr. Ringold?"

"In about a week, I expect. I have a few more details to arrange."

"I suppose you boys are all ready to go?" asked the photographer.

"Yes," answered Blake. "We expect that automatic camera in a day or so. We're going to

test it here, to be sure it works right. We'll be ready any time you are."

"Where do we land first?" asked Joe.

"Denver, Colorado," answered the theatrical man. "I have a play, some of the scenes of which are located there, and I want it to be as realistic as possible. Denver for ours."

"Denver!" exclaimed C. C. Piper, coming out of his dressing-room, with some of his comic make-up still on, for he was one of the few characters that did use grease paint, his antics as a clown necessitating this in spite of what I have said regarding how glaringly make-up shows. In his case the broad lines and other clown devices had to be designated.

"Certainly, Denver," repeated Mr. Ringold. "What have you got against it, C. C.? You look about as happy as a crutch."

"Denver!" exclaimed the gloomy comedian. "You know I have a weak heart, and that rarefied atmosphere is bad for it. Yet you lug me off to Denver, just as if you didn't care! Oh, why did I ever go into this miserable business? It will be the death of me! I wish I'd stayed with the circus!"

"Cheer up, Gloomy!" cried little Miss Lee, the pretty girl whom Blake very much admired. "The worst is yet to come!"

"Oh, I know it," he answered, without a change in his manner. "We'll either starve to death out in that wild country, or the Indians will capture us, and hold us for ransom. But don't ransom me," he added quickly. "I'm not worth it. Let me die among the cowboys with my boots on!"

"Oh!" cried Mr. Hadley, with a laugh. "Can't you see a rift in the clouds anywhere, Gloomy?"

"No, it looks more than ever like rain," declared the man of gloom, gazing out into the cloudless blue sky. "And I can't bear railroad trains. Oh, I'm not going!" and he withdrew into his dressing-room, while the others of the company burst into laughter.

"He certainly is the limit," declared Joe.

"He'd cry at a circus," agreed Blake.

The moving picture theatre became busier than ever, for, with the closing of the season in the East, the performers had to arrange for going West.

Joe and Blake, having witnessed all they cared to in regard to filming a moving picture play, took their leave, having said good-by to the members of the company until they should meet them *en route* for the land of the cowboys and Indians.

There were many details yet to be looked after, but, in the next few days, not only Mr. Ringold

and Mr. Hadley, but the boys themselves, succeeded in completing their arrangements so that they could leave for the West.

The new automatic camera was purchased, and proved all that could be desired. The boys tried it out on some street scenes and it recorded them faithfully, once they had filled the compressed air tank and set the mechanism.

Finding that they had a day or so to spare, and having nothing special to do, Joe and Blake decided to take a trip back to their former homes. Of course the farm that Blake's uncle had once owned was sold, and Mr. Haverstraw was in an institution. But Mr. Bradley, for whom Joe used to work, was still on his place.

He was glad to see his hired boy, and made him an offer to come back to the farm at increased wages. But Joe laughingly declined.

"I'm making too much at moving pictures," declared the lad.

"Just remember," said the old farmer, "that a rolling stone gathers no moss, and I take it that them moving pictures are like rolling stones, leastwise they're moving all the while, from what I hear tell."

"They do move," agreed Joe; "and we move with 'em. But we do gather some moss while

we move. I'm afraid I can't come back to the farm, Mr. Bradley."

Blake visited his uncle at the Home. The lad explained his success in life, and told about the strange letter that had come to Joe.

"I'm hoping to find some folks," said the boy who had no relatives.

"I'm sure I hope you do," said Mr. Haverstraw. "Being alone in the world is a very lonesome job. Good luck to you!"

And so, a few days later, the moving picture boys, with their assistant, Charlie Anderson, known as Macaroni, together with Mr. Hadley, Mr. Ringold and the members of the theatrical company, a number of cameras and plenty of film, started West.

"But we'll never get there!" declared C. C., in gloomy tones. "Something is sure to happen on the way!"

CHAPTER VIII

A GLIMPSE OF RIVALS

PROVIDED one is fond of excitement, change, fun, hard work, has unlimited patience, and can laugh at trouble, probably there is nothing better calculated to give one a different view of life than to travel with a theatrical company.

Joe Duncan and Blake Stewart found this out before they had been many days on the trip to the great West, where they hoped to make many films of moving picture dramas, and also to get scenes of the Indians who had left their reservations in order to perform what, to them, were sacred rites.

The theatrical company had a special car, which the boys shared, and with a dining coach attached to the train, and a sleeper available at all times, the trip was made in fine fashion.

"It's some different than when I came from the West," remarked Joe, as they drew out of Pittsburg, having just finished a bountiful meal.

"How was that?" asked Blake.

"I rode on a freight then," was the reply. "I was too small to do it in the regular way on the brake beams, and I managed to prevail upon the train crew to let me come into the caboose. Sometimes they gave me something to eat, but oftener I went hungry, for I was too proud to beg. I was a little chap, but can remember that part of it very well, though I don't recall the names of the places I passed through."

"And now you're going back West," spoke Blake.

"Yes, but in a different fashion. And I wish I was sure of finding some one to welcome me at the end. When I got East, some years ago, I was as friendless as when I came from the West. I'd like to change the situation now, and find some one waiting for me, and glad to see me."

"Maybe you will," suggested Blake. "I have a sort of feeling that we will find that strange Mr. Reed, Joe, and that we'll locate Big B ranch."

"Oh, I hope we do. Then I'd have folks!" exclaimed the other.

As nothing could be done on the trip West in the way of making moving pictures, the company of theatrical folk, and the boys, gave themselves up to such pleasures as were available. Some of the girls and women of the troupe made fancy work, or mended the clothes that had suffered by

a long season in the mimic theatre, and out of doors.

The men paid visits to the smoker, played games, or made acquaintances, with whom they talked or swapped stories. The boys spent much time in the company of Mr. Hadley, who was a perfect mine of information about moving pictures.

At different times he told them of the industry from the time when the first crude moving pictures were made to the present, when the most weird and uncanny, as well as the most beautiful, effects can be produced.

"There is a branch—or, to be exact, several branches—of the industry that I want to know more about," said the photographer in talking of the work. "One is the making of views of animal life, and the other is microbes."

"I thought microbes were animal life," said Joe.

"They are, to a certain extent," went on Mr. Hadley; "and it is possible to show germs at work in the blood system, greatly magnifying them, of course. Then there is the phase of wild animal life that I want to look into—the making of pictures of wild beasts in the jungle, showing them at the water holes, in their combats, and at peace."

"Cracky!" cried Blake. "That would suit me!"

"Perhaps I'll arrange to have you boys do it for me," said the photographer.

On the second day out, having to wait at a small town on account of a train wreck, the boys and the photographer walked about the place. In one store window a peculiar piece of mechanism attracted the attention of Joe and Blake. It was in a toy shop.

"What's that?" asked Joe, curiously.

"It looks like some sort of fireless cooker," said Blake.

The apparatus was like a shallow drum, with the top open, and it was mounted on a stand so that it could revolve freely. In the outer edge, near the top, were a number of open slots, and inside it were some strips of paper with black figures printed in outline. One was of a girl skipping a rope, showing her in different positions, and another was of a man making a garden.

"Boys!" cried the photographer, "you're looking at one of the first moving picture machines ever made. I didn't think there were any outside of museums now. Let's go in and have a closer view of it."

Telling the proprietress of the shop what they wanted, the photographer was soon operating the apparatus. Taking one of the strips of black pic-

tures he inserted it in the drumlike affair. The latter he set to revolving swiftly.

"Now look through the slots," he said to the boys.

They did so, and by reason of the rapid revolution of the drum, and the slots which broke the vision into intermittent scenes, they saw the girl slowly skip the rope and the man dig in the soil.

"It's just as if you saw the pictures thrown on the screen one after the other," said Mr. Hadley. "Your visual persistence makes you think you see these images move, when they are broken up into a rapid series by means of the slots in the drum. I recall seeing one of these when I was a student at high school, but I never imagined then that moving pictures would attain their present perfection."

"Is that what this is—a moving picture machine?" asked the lady who kept the store.

"That's what it is," said Mr. Hadley. "Why, what did you imagine it to be?"

"None of us knew," went on the store lady. "I got it in a bargain lot of toys, and somebody said it was a corn-popper, and others a sort of game, but none of us rightly knew, and so I never could sell it. Now that I know I'll put a sign on it, and I'll show whoever buys it how to work it."

Talking of the strides the industry had made

since the early days, the three went back to the train, which was about ready to start. They found C. C. Piper staring rather disconsolately at the engine.

"What's the matter now?" asked Mr. Hadley.

"Nothing," replied the comedian, gloomily.

"Oh, yes, there is," insisted the photographer. "I never see you look like that but I know something is wrong. Out with it, and if we can help you we will."

"Well, I don't like the looks of this engine," said the apprehensive man. "It looks to me as if one of the wheels had a crack in it, and I'm sure it will fly apart when we get going at high speed. That will cause a wreck, and—well—you know what that means. I wish I'd never come on this trip."

"Oh, you make me laugh, C. C.!" exclaimed the photographer. "This is the limit. That wheel is no more cracked than you are!"

"Is that a joke?" demanded the comedian.

"Well—er—I didn't mean it that way," said Mr. Hadley; "but why don't you be more cheerful?—always talking about wrecks and funerals. What started you?"

"I saw a black cat as we got off the car," said C. C., "and that is always a sign of bad luck. But I'll leave it to the engineer," he went on, as

the driver of the locomotive came up with oil can in hand. "Isn't that big wheel cracked?" and Gloomy pointed to what looked like a flaw in the metal.

"Cracked!" cried the railroad man. "That's the oil groove, and the other is the place where the wedge-pin goes in. Don't bother me any more. This is no theatre place for jokes," and turning his back on the comedian he proceeded to lubricate the mechanism.

"That's the time C. C. got *his*," remarked Joe, with a laugh, as they entered their private car. The comic actor did not make any reply, but he seemed much brighter, now that he was assured there was no immediate danger of a wreck.

The trip was resumed, and as the miles were covered there began to be talk of the new life the company was to lead in the West. It would be much different from that in the city, amid new surroundings, and would be less burdensome from some standpoints.

"I want you to get the atmosphere of the West," said Mr. Ringold to his players. "If we're going to do cowboy and Indian stunts, we must do them as the cow punchers and redmen would do them. Of course we'll have some of them in the scenes, too. Have you boys heard any more about your wild Indians?" he asked.

"We have had one letter from the geographical society since we started," said Blake. "They reported that the Indians were still off the reservation, and that the chances of getting views of them were good, provided we could find them."

"I guess we'll have to take the trail," explained Joe. "If the government agents and soldiers can't locate 'em, we're going to have our own troubles, too."

"You'll never locate 'em," declared C. C., in his most doleful tone. "Or, if you do, they'll attack you and smash your cameras before you have a chance to get one reel."

"Don't you believe him," whispered Mr. Hadley to his young friends, and, to their credit, Joe and Blake were not at all discouraged by the gloomy prediction.

To make the time pass, all the theatrical people, the boys, the photographer and the manager, would get together in the end of the car. Then jokes and stories would be told, songs sung to the accompaniment of a banjo, which one of the men played, and the ladies would prepare little surprises for the men and boys.

One day it was a little luncheon, and all the guests, even to Joe, Blake and Macaroni, were required to make informal addresses. C. C. was

in his element then, prophesying all sorts of dire happenings as likely to occur.

Other hours were spent by some members of the company in rehearsing their new parts in brief, and once an elderly lady, who wandered into the car by mistake, received a great fright when the manager, Mr. Ringold, and a member of the company were talking over a change in the plot.

"I think he had better be killed first," said Mr. Ringold, referring to a certain character. "Then it will be easier to get his money."

"Well, maybe it will," admitted the actor. "But how would you do it; by poison, stabbing or shooting?"

"Shooting," decided the manager quickly. "Shoot him in the back as he comes up the walk. The smoke always shows up well. Shoot him, by all means!"

The little old lady, thinking she was listening to a murder plot, fled from the car, calling for the police, and it required considerable explanation to make her understand that it was only in a play that a man was to be "murdered."

It was at a way station, while waiting for an express to pass so the theatrical train could proceed, that Joe and Blake received quite a surprise. They had alighted, to walk about and stretch their car-weary legs, when the noise of the approaching

train, that would give them the right of way, was heard.

"Now we'll move," said Joe. "I'm going to try for a snap shot of the cars and engine. I want to see how speedy my new camera is," for he had purchased a small pocket camera that took single views.

As the train came nearer it slowed up, and Joe had no difficulty in snapping it. As he looked up, having closed the camera, he was surprised to hear an exclamation from Blake.

"Did you see who was in that train?" asked his chum excitedly.

"No. Who?"

"As it went past I had a glimpse of our rival, Munson, and several of his men were with him."

"Is that right?"

"It sure is! He's on the trail fast enough."

CHAPTER IX

UNEXPECTED PICTURES

"WELL," remarked Joe, after a pause, during which the other train rushed on; "we can't help it, can we?"

"No, we have been expecting it all along. And yet I have been hoping that he and his crowd would fail at the last minute. I'd rather have any other concern try to compete with us than Munson's. Others would be fair, and I don't believe he will," and Blake shook his head despondently.

"Well, we'll just have to fight him if he tries any tricks," declared Joe. "I'm not afraid."

"Nor I, either," added his chum. "Yet it's discouraging when you try to do good work to know that you may be beaten by a trick."

They discussed the matter, but decided to say nothing to Mr. Hadley about seeing Munson.

"He'll think we don't know enough to fight our own battles, maybe," said Blake, and Joe agreed

with him. Yet both boys were a bit uneasy over the outcome of their moving picture experiment.

A day later they had reached what might be called the real West, but even then it was still far from being the land of the cowboy and Indian. But, as the train rushed on, every hour took it, and its occupants, farther and farther from civilization, except in the big Western cities.

"It won't be long before we are there, now," said Mr. Hadley, one afternoon, as he consulted a time-table. "Denver isn't so far off. I'll be glad to get on solid ground again. I'm tired of train-riding, and I'm anxious to get the handle of a moving picture camera between my fingers again."

"You have taken some views since we started, haven't you?" asked Blake.

"Yes, a few from the back platform, that a concern wanted to use in a sort of 'travelogue' lecture. But that isn't the real article. I want to get more action in my views. I'd like to take some scenes of——"

But Mr. Hadley did not finish what he was saying, for at that instant there was a grinding of the brakes, shrill protests from the wheels, and the train came to such an abrupt stop that many of the passengers in the theatrical car slid from their seats.

"What's the matter?"

"There's going to be a collision!"

"It's a wreck!"

"We're going to hit something!"

"Hold me, somebody!"

"Look out!"

These were only a few of the cries that followed the sudden stopping of the train. Hardly had it come to a halt than two men leaped into the theatrical car—one at each end.

"Lively now!" they cried. "Tumble out, everybody, and keep your hands above your heads! We'll shoot if you don't!"

It needed but a glance to show that the two men each carried big revolvers—one in each hand—and they waved them in a threatening manner.

"Oh, my!" cried C. C., despondently. "I knew it! I knew we'd have bad luck on this trip! A hold-up! They'll take all I've got!"

"And maybe we won't get an awful lot, pard!" cried one of the hold-up men. "Lively now! Tumble out, and remember to keep your hands up!"

"Do—do you mean the—the ladies—too?" asked Miss Shay, the leading woman, who had given the boys their first glimpse of moving picture realism in the creek.

"We sure do, lady!" exclaimed one of the

masked men. "Keep your hands up. When you get outside one of my partners will relieve you of what diamonds you don't need," and he laughed.

Miss Shay's hands flew to her ears, where dangled large diamonds. Her fingers, too, were covered with jewels, of which she was very fond.

"Oh, dear!" she cried; "I can't part with them!"

"You've got to!" was the heartless response. "Tumble out now. Lively!"

There was no help for it, and much chagrined, and not a little afraid, every member of the theatrical company hastily left the car under the watchful eyes and the unwavering guns of the hold-up men.

"I—I wonder if they'll take my watch?" faltered Macaroni to his two youthful employers. "It's only nickel, but it cost me three dollars, and I want it. I wonder if I could hide it in my shoe?"

"Better not try," advised Joe. "They might be mean enough to do you some harm if they saw you. But I'll speak to them about it when they get to us. They don't want cheap watches, I guess."

"It keeps good time, if it is cheap," declared the stout lad, in some indignation.

"I wonder if Munson can have had anything to do with this?" murmured Blake, as he and Joe walked from the car with their hands above their heads, and stood in line, feeling foolish as well as chagrined. Outside they found a number of other hold-up men, all masked, and one of them holding a number of horses.

Another man was guarding the engineer and fireman, who had been compelled to leave the cab, and the locomotive was blowing off steam at a great rate.

"Line up!" called one of the hold-up men. "We'll not detain you long. Go through 'em, Jake!"

While several of the desperadoes stood guard over the indignant theatrical company, and the other passengers, one of the number searched the men of the party for valuables. Considerable money and jewelry was taken and tossed into the big hats the bandits had.

"We'll trust the ladies to search themselves," said the robber who was evidently at the head of the gang; "seeing as we have no matron in our company. Put your diamonds and jewelry and money into the hat as I pass it along."

"I—I'll not!" screamed Miss Shay. "I'm not going to lose my diamonds! I'll let you shoot me

first!" and she turned and ran back toward the car.

"Stop her!" cried one of the bandits.

"The scoundrels!" cried Mr. Hadley, and he made a motion toward his hip pocket.

"Hold on!" yelled Mr. Ringold. "It's all right. Don't shoot!"

"Why not?" demanded the photographer indignantly. "Do you think I'm going to stand for this when I've got a gun?"

"Don't use it," advised the theatrical manager. "It might be dangerous."

"Didn't I tell you we'd have bad luck?" demanded C. C. in doleful accents, as he stood with his hands over his head. "I just knew this trip would be a fizzle! Here we've all been robbed before we've had a chance to see what Western life is like. But I knew how it would be. I told you so."

"As long as they don't take our cameras, and outfits, we can still do business," murmured Blake, as he thought with regret of a pretty pin he had purchased for Miss Lee, and which he had intended giving her on her birthday, the date of which he had learned. Now the robbers had it.

"It's a shame!" declared Joe.

"Oh, why don't some of you men shoot?" de-

manded Miss Shay, who had reached the car, and turned to look back.

Some of the hold-up men began laughing. One or two lowered their revolvers. There was a smile on the face of Mr. Ringold.

"I guess we've got enough," he said.

At that moment the engine ceased blowing off steam, and Joe and Blake became aware of a clicking noise in the bushes behind them. Turning quickly they saw the familiar outlines of a moving picture camera. A man was industriously grinding at the handle.

"Very well done," went on the theatrical man. "I guess that was realistic enough. Pass around the valuables now, and everyone help himself."

CHAPTER X

OUT WEST

THERE was silence for several seconds in the crowd of theatrical people who had been "held up," and then C. C. burst out with:

"Say, do you mean to tell me, Mr. Ringold, that this was all a fake?"

"Well, not exactly a fake," was the slow answer; "for the moving pictures are real enough. But if you mean were these fake bandits, why I'll have to say yes."

"That's what I mean!" exclaimed the comedian. "Well, if this isn't the limit!"

"And aren't we really robbed?" asked Miss Lee, with a laugh in her voice.

"Not this time!" exclaimed Mr. Ringold. "Gentlemen, pass the valuables to the lady," and he laughed, while Joe and Blake gazed curiously at the "robbers," who were now removing their masks of black cloth, while the moving pic-

ture man—a stranger, as were the others who took part in the hold-up—began taking apart his machine for transportation.

"What do you suppose he did it for?" asked Joe.

"I can't imagine—unless——" began Blake, when Mr. Ringold interrupted with:

"I suppose you are all wondering why I did this. I'll tell you. In one of the dramas we are to enact there is a train hold-up called for in the plot. I realized that this might be hard to get, once we were out on the plains of Arizona, making more peaceful scenes, so I decided to have the hold-up occur now, and work it into the proper film afterward.

"Then, too, I wanted it as realistic as possible, and I knew if you were told, beforehand, that you were going to be held up, you might not act naturally, no matter how hard you tried, so I decided to have it occur unexpectedly."

"But how did you work it?" asked Mr. Hadley, who was as much surprised as any of the others. "How did you get the engineer to stop?"

"Oh, I have a little pull with the railroad, and they arranged that part. The train was a little ahead of time, so the short delay won't much matter."

"But—er—but are these gentlemen—er—regu-

lar robbers?" hesitated C. C., as one of the "bandits" gave him back his watch.

"That's getting personal," laughed one of the hold-up men. "I'd rather not answer."

"They are not bandits," said Mr. Ringold. "They are cowboys from a near-by ranch, and some time ago, when I knew we were coming on this Western trip, I arranged to have them play these parts. I think you'll agree with me that they did well."

"Couldn't have been better," said Mr. Hadley, with a grim laugh.

"I sure thought we were goners," declared Joe.

"And I imagined I had seen the last of my pocketbook," added Blake, while Macaroni, with a queer little laugh, remarked:

"Well, I'm glad to get back my watch, even if it is only nickel," and he put it into his pocket with every appearance of satisfaction.

"I also arranged in advance for the moving picture operator," went on the theatrical man, "and he was right here when I needed him. Oh, but it was funny to see the looks on your faces! It will make a fine film!"

"But you acted as scared as any of us," declared Miss Shay.

"I didn't want you to suspect anything," replied the manager; "but it was all I could do to

keep from laughing. Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you for your part in this affair," and he nodded toward the "bandits," who seemed as much amused as was the theatrical man.

The operator of the moving picture camera now handed to Mr. Ringold the light-tight boxes of exposed film and prepared to leave. The cowboys, who had turned train robbers for the time being, leaped on their horses, and, with waves of their hats, rode off.

"All aboard!" called the train conductor, and the passengers from the other cars, of whom there were only a few, got back to their seats, as did the theatrical troupe. Most of the former, who had wondered why they had not been robbed, now understood the queer hold-up. Only the theatrical people figured on the film.

"Say," remarked Joe to his chum, when they were back in their places, and the train was speeding farther West; "you have to do all sorts of tricks in this business, don't you?"

"You do to get realism, I guess," replied Blake.

"It certainly was a bit unexpected," declared Mr. Hadley. "But, for that reason, it was all the better. Most of the moving picture managers strive to have scenes made as real as possible. The day when a forest can be represented by a painted

back drop in a theatre is past. Nowadays the company is taken out into the woods and photographed there, if the scene calls for a forest.

"I remember one manager in Chicago, where I first worked, trying to think of some way to show the heroine of the play being rescued from a burning building by the hero. He wanted a real fire, but it was out of the question to start one that would look like what it ought to be, and so deceive the public."

"How did he manage it?" asked Joe.

"Well, while he was puzzling his head over the matter, wondering how he was to show a fire in the centre of a big city, and a rescue, word came in that one of Chicago's department stores was burning. It was the very chance he wanted.

"His players were all ready. The fire department was appealed to, and permission given the hero-actor to assume the part of a fireman. He was game, too, that actor was, as well as the little lady who was to be rescued.

"The store was pretty well afire, though it was possible to control it, when the actress entered and took her place at an upper window, calling for help. The moving picture operator was right there, and soon the hero, in the guise of a fireman, entered the burning building carrying a line of hose. Then he pretended to hear the calls for

help on the part of the lady. Up he went, got her over his shoulder, soon to come running out of the fiercely blazing store, in full sight of the real crowd, and, incidentally, to be snapped by the camera. It was as realistic a fire scene as you could wish, and when that part of the film was worked into the other reels of the play, it made a big sensation, and set the pace for other theatrical managers. So that's why I say realism is carried to great lengths to-day, as you can easily understand when Mr. Ringold arranged for the hold-up."

"I hope he doesn't try any train wrecks," said Blake. "They aren't so easy to make up, and some one might get hurt."

"No, I don't imagine he'll risk that," said the photographer; "but I once knew a manager who needed a scene in which a freight car had to be shown rolled off the track down an embankment. He bought an old freight car, got permission from a railroad to run it over their line and shove it down a hill, and when the car got to the bottom, pretty well smashed, and turned upside down, the company of players were taken there and the rest of the scene enacted. That was realism again for you."

"Say, I wish you'd stop talking about realism,"

broke in C. C. Piper. "I'm afraid something *real* will happen soon."

"Oh, you're nervous," declared Miss Lee, who, with others of the company, had come up to where the boys and Mr. Hadley were talking.

"Maybe I am," admitted the actor; "but I have a feeling that we left the cook behind at that hold-up business, and we may not get anything to eat for some time."

"I'll take a look," offered Blake, and he came back presently to report that the cook was safe aboard and getting up a particularly fine meal.

"Well, he may spoil it before it's served," said C. C., gloomily.

"And if he doesn't do that, I suppose you'll have indigestion, or something like that, so you can't eat; won't you, poor little boy?" mocked Miss Birdie Lee, with a jolly laugh.

C. C. scowled, but said nothing, though it was noticed later that he ate with his usual appetite.

Denver was reached in due course, and in spite of the high altitude neither the comedian, nor any of the company, suffered any ill effects, though for a day or two C. C. went about with a long face, and his hand held nervously over his heart.

There were busy times for all, the boys assisting Mr. Hadley in getting many thousands of feet of film for the acts required in the city. Some

were made indoors and others in the streets or suburbs.

"But I'm anxious to get out to the real West," said Joe, when they had been in Denver about two weeks. "I want to make a hunt for Big B ranch."

"And I want to get after some of those Indian pictures," declared Blake. "Munson and his crowd may be on the ground now."

"They're ahead of us, at any rate," said Joe. "He probably has nothing to do but get after those pictures, and we have to stay with this theatrical crowd."

"But that's our business," urged Blake. "The Indian pictures are only a side line, anyhow, though I want very much to get them. And we will, too. We'll soon be leaving here, and then we'll have livelier times among the cowboys."

A week later the entire company of theatrical people, with the boys, reached Flagstaff, Arizona, which was to be the headquarters for some time, though trips would be made out into the wilder parts of the country surrounding it, to get various bits of local color.

The first night in town Joe and Blake, wandering about, saw a cowboy limping along, his arm in a sling, and several scarcely healed cuts on his face.

"He looks as if he'd been in the war," remarked Joe in a low voice, but not so low, however, that the man did not hear him.

"I have been in the war, son," he said, seemingly not displeased at the comment; "and I won't be in a hurry to go back, either."

"What war was it?" asked Blake, curiously.

"Well, it wasn't exactly a battle. I'd been on a ranch up near the Moqui Indian country and had quit. I heard of a job down here and was after it. I was riding alone—a foolish thing, as I can see now—when I was caught by some of those roving bands of redskins that have jumped the reservation."

"Were you caught by the Indians?" cried Joe, excitedly.

"That's what I was, stranger," answered the cowboy. "I put up as good a fight as I could, but they were too much for me, though I finished some of 'em."

"What did they do to you?" asked Blake, looking at the maimed and scarred man, who had evidently suffered much at the hands of the very Indians whom the lads hoped to picture.

"They put me through the third degree, son."

"You mean—torture?" asked Joe, in a low voice.

"That's about it, son. Oh, they're regular

imps. The government ought to take stronger measures against 'em. If they're not chased back soon on their own hunting grounds, and kept there, there'll be mischief doing. There are Navajos with the Moquis, and when they get doing their crazy dances they're as bad as insane persons. Pity any one who falls into their clutches!"

CHAPTER XI

C. C. BALKS

BLAKE and Joe looked at each other. Decidedly this was more than they had bargained for. It was one thing to try to get pictures of a peaceable band of Indians engaged in some of their queer rites and ceremonies, but quite another to "film" Indians who would do such things as had evidently been done to this cowboy, whose looks told a story of much suffering and hardship.

"What did they do to you?" asked Joe, at length.

"I don't like to talk about it, son," was the answer. "It's like some bad dream, and though it happened a couple of weeks ago, I still wake up in the night thinking I'm in their hands again. I don't like to talk about it, but you can see what they did."

He pointed to his scarred face, indicated his lame leg and showed his arm, that seemed to have been twisted about until it was nearly dislocated and much swollen.

"They're just as bad as insane persons when they get crazy over their dances and religious rites," went on the cowboy. "They even torture themselves and they don't seem to mind the pain, though I felt mine all right enough."

"How did you get away?" asked Blake.

"One night they were more particularly crazy than before, and didn't keep much of a guard over me. I managed to sneak away from their camp on the plains and take a little water with me. I left them chasing about, dancing and capering around the fires, some of 'em leaping up and down with snakes in their hands, but I didn't stop to look back.

"I just hiked right along, and finally managed, after about as hard a time as I can ever remember, in getting in with some miners who brought me here. No more Indians for mine! The government is doing wrong being so gentle with 'em."

"But I heard they did not try to drive them back to the reservations by harsh means because they were afraid of causing an uprising," said Blake.

"I heard the same thing," admitted the cowboy; "but there'll be an uprising anyhow, if the government Indian agents don't look out. Some of the cowboys and miners around here will take the

law into their own hands if those imps aren't driven back where they belong."

"Whereabouts are some of them now?" asked Joe.

The cowboy looked at him curiously, then remarked:

"Say, strangers, of course it's none of my affair, but being as you and me has become sort of friendly like, I'm going to take a little liberty. I can see that you're tenderfoots, but you don't look like lads that has been reading dime novels and got locoed over 'em. Look here, now; you wasn't aimin' to go out huntin' them Indians, was you?" and the cowboy seemed very much in earnest.

"Well, no, not exactly hunting them," spoke Blake; "though we do want to find 'em."

"Lopsided lariats! What for?" cried the cowboy.

"To get moving pictures for a geographical society," replied Blake.

"Moving pictures! And you'll risk your lives for them?"

"There's a good prize offered," went on Joe; "and we are in the moving picture business."

"Prize!" scoffed the cowboy.

"Do you really think we would risk our lives?" asked Blake.

"I sure do—if those Indians catch you," was the solemn answer. "They're not in their right minds. It's the first time they've broken off their reservations in some years, to perform what they believe are holy dances, and they're fair crazy over 'em. Don't let 'em catch you, whatever you do. Moving pictures—huh!" and the injured cowboy moved away.

"Do you think he means it?" asked Joe, as he and Blake turned back to the hotel where the company was stopping.

"I guess he does, Joe, but are you going to——?"

"Going to back out? Not much! I'm with you to the end."

"Glad to hear it. I'm going to stick, too. But I guess we'll have to be more careful than I thought would be necessary."

"It looks so. And I guess Munson and his crowd won't have any too good a time. Those fellows are impulsive if they don't get just what they want, or if they think any one is interfering with them, and they may start a fight with the Indians."

"And that would make it bad for us," declared Blake. "Well, there's no use being like C. C. and imagining things are going to happen. Time

enough to get ready for trouble when you see it coming. We'll do the best we can."

"Sure," agreed his chum, yet they were both a little uneasy over what the cowboy had told them, especially as they heard the next day that some miners had been attacked by a roving band of the Moqui Indians, who were driven off with difficulty, after injuring some of the white men.

There was much indignation against the government for not taking more energetic measures, and there was talk of getting up a company of cowboys to go out against the redmen, but nothing came of it.

"The worst of it is," said a veteran miner with whom Joe and Blake scraped up an acquaintance; "these Indians are like a flea. When you think you've got 'em you haven't. They're in one place one day and thirty miles away the next, for they've got some good ponies and they're all armed, though how they got the guns is more than I know."

"Oh, you boys will never get back to civilization if you go out to take pictures of the Indians," gloomily predicted C. C. Blake and Joe did not answer.

"All ready for our first outdoor rehearsal!" called Mr. Ringold to the assembled company of players, about a week after reaching Flagstaff.

"We're to go about ten miles out, on a sort of plain, to get scenes for the new picture play 'An Indian's Revenge.' You all have your parts and I want this to be as realistic as possible. Some of you may have to stand a little roughing it, but I'm sure you won't mind when you know it is in the interests of the company. The better films we make the better price we can get for them."

"I do hope I won't have to fall overboard again," said Miss Shay, with a sigh.

"And I don't want any more tank dramas," added C. C. Piper.

"Don't worry," laughed Mr. Ringold. "Water is too scarce out in this country to waste it on tank dramas. I want to get some scenes near the Little Colorado River, though, and we may have to do some splashing."

"No splashing for mine!" exclaimed C. C. firmly.

"Oh, I guess you won't mind when you get all heated up," went on Mr. Ringold. "It's going to be hot to-day."

A little later the entire company, including the two boys and Mr. Hadley, who were to make the pictures, were on their way to a selected spot where part of the Indian play was to be filmed.

"I have arranged for a number of cowboys and friendly Indians to take part in this," said the

theatrical man, when they were nearly at the place.

"Are you sure the Indians are *friendly?*" asked Miss Lee. "I am too young to be scalped."

"Fear not! I'll protect thee!" exclaimed Mr. Levinberg, in his heaviest "villain's" voice.

"Yes, he'll stab some of the redmen with those toothpick shoes he wears," put in C. C., for the "leading heavy" wore very pointed footgear.

"There are our helpers!" exclaimed Mr. Ringold, about an hour later, when they made a turn in the road, and came upon a wide, level stretch. "They're gathered about the log cabin I had made purposely for this act."

The boys and the others saw a crowd of cowboys and Indians gathered fraternally together, awaiting the arrival of the theatrical people. As the latter were to take the main parts, and the cowboys and Indians were only required to act as supernumeraries, they did not need much drilling.

"Say, they're the real article, sure enough," remarked Joe, as he and his chum got a closer view of the waiting crowd.

"They are indeed," declared Blake.

"It wouldn't do to fake in such a matter," said Mr. Hadley; "especially when we can get the real article so easily. They'll add realism to the pic-

tures, too. Now, boys, are your cameras in good shape?"

"All ready," answered Blake.

Mr. Ringold soon explained to the cowboys and the Indian interpreter what was wanted, and the rehearsal began, while the photographers got ready to take the pictures.

"Here, C. C.!" called Mr. Ringold, "I've got a nice part for you. You're supposed to be a wounded cowboy who is nursed by an Indian squaw. Hi there, interpreter! Pick out a nice squaw to look after our funny friend here."

"Sure," grunted the fat Indian, who spoke fairly good English. "Me pick out big one. Come, Laughing Water, be nurse for paleface!"

An old squaw, who looked to be anything but "Laughing Water," waddled forward. She was fat and ugly and not overly clean.

"What! Is she going to be my nurse?" cried Mr. Piper, pausing in the act of strapping his revolvers in a belt around his waist.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Ringold.

"Well, I guess not!" cried the comedian, who was to take a serious part for once. "She'll scalp me when no one is looking! I'm not going to play in this drama if I've got to have her for a nurse," and he began taking off his firearms.

CHAPTER XII

TOWARD INDIAN LAND

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Ringold, and his tone of voice showed that he was much in earnest. "You'll go through with this part, C. C. Piper, or you quit the company! I know what I'm doing, and I want this played realistic."

"Realistic!" repeated the comedian, with a groan. "This is too much! If I've got to have an Indian nurse can't I have one that's clean, at least? That one over there would suit," and he pointed toward a prepossessing Indian maiden, who giggled, while the old squaw scowled.

"Her best Indian medicine squaw," declared the interpreter, pointing toward the one he had selected. "Her know how cure sick folks."

"But I'm not really sick!" exclaimed C. C., eagerly. "I'm only *supposed* to be sick in this play. I don't need to be cured."

"Sure squaw cure you," insisted the interpreter, who rejoiced in the name of Running Cow. "Her got good medicine."

"But I tell you I won't have her!" cried the comedian. "If she tries to poke some of her roots and herbs down my throat I sure *will* be sick. Can't you do something different from this?" and he appealed to the manager, who was laughing now, in spite of his first sternness.

"Oh, I suppose so," agreed Mr. Ringold. "Take any squaw you like, only, as you're supposed to fall in love later with an Indian maiden, I thought, for the purpose of contrast, that an old and—er—well, say an unbeautiful squaw, would be best for a nurse. But have it your own way. Get another squaw, Running Cow."

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian interpreter. "Old squaw no like be taken an' then not taken!"

"Jealous, eh?" exclaimed Mr. Piper. "Here's a quarter for her!" and he tossed over the coin, at which the old woman laughed, while the younger and prettier Indian maiden looked hopeful.

"Now I guess we can go on, if C. C. is satisfied," remarked Mr. Ringold. "You all know your parts. Get the cowboys together, Mr. Brattin," he added, to the foreman of the "punchers," who had charge of them. "I want them to come on lively at the rescue."

"All right," was the answer.

"And have your Indians move fast, too,

Running Cow," the theatrical man said to the interpreter.

"Me do," came the response. "They much run!"

In brief, the play to be enacted told the story, in pictures, of some white settlers who went West, had various adventures, were attacked by the Indians and rescued by a band of cowboys. There was a love story running through the drama, which was to be in a number of scenes, only a part of which were out of doors, among the cowboys and Indians.

The rehearsal began, and after some mistakes, went smoothly enough. Some of the parts were cut down and others elaborated. Then, when the amount of time had been allotted to each act, and the number of feet of film for it decided on, Mr. Ringold gave the word.

In order to hasten matters three moving picture machines, stationed at different points, were used. Blake and Joe were each to operate one and Mr. Hadley would be in charge of the other.

"All ready now!" called Mr. Ringold, at the conclusion of the final rehearsal. "Everybody on the job! Lively! Are you there with the cameras?"

"Yes," called Blake and Joe, while Mr. Hadley,

being some distance off, waved his hand to show that he was prepared.

Then the play began. There was the march across the waterless plains, the rush of the Indians, who fired their guns and revolvers containing blank cartridges with evident delight. The men and women were captured in the most approved fashion, and so real was some of the acting of the Indians that some of the women members wept real tears.

"All the better!" cried Mr. Hadley. "This will show up in great shape. It's going fine."

But if the Indians had done some rough riding and shooting, when it came the turn of the cowboys to make the rescue they outdid their traditional enemies.

With whoops and roars, with swinging of their hats and lariats, and with a fusillade of shots, the cow-punchers rushed to the deliverance of the white settlers. There was almost as much smoke as at a real engagement. Horses stumbled and went down, their riders leaping out of the way just in time. Some of the cowboys, and not a few of the Indians, had to "play dead" to make the scene look real.

Then came the repulse of the redmen, the rescue of the whites and the carrying into captivity of C. C. Piper. Then followed the nursing scene

of the comedian in the wigwam of the Indian squaw.

"Has she got to give me medicine?" asked Gloomy, for the scene was taking place close to the camera in order to make the figures look larger. Mr. Ringold, and many others, stood near, out of range of the moving picture machine, of course.

"Certainly she's got to give you medicine," declared the manager. "I want this to look real. Cold tea in a glass will do. It will show up well on the screen. And you drink it, too, understand!"

"Oh, why did I ever go into this business?" groaned the comedian. "I know I'll get indigestion. She'll give me ink instead of cold tea!"

"Keep quiet!" ordered the manager. "You're supposed to be too sick to talk."

"Oh, I'm *sick* all right," declared C. C., with a groan. "And I'll be sicker before she gets through nursing me."

"White man heap 'fraid!" murmured the younger squaw, laughing; and then the business of the drama went on in the half-opened Indian tent, the whirring and clicking camera catching every movement and expression.

The play was over in about an hour, and the company returned to town, the Indians and cow-

boys having been paid off. They were to be in readiness for a different sort of play a few days later.

For two weeks pictures were taken nearly every day. The long hours of bright sunlight made it comparatively easy to get good films, especially as many were taken on the white, dust-covered plains, that offered a good contrast in lights and shadows.

The boys and Mr. Hadley were kept busy. And it was not all easy sailing, either. Often the cowboys and Indians could not seem to understand what was wanted, and rehearsal after rehearsal had to be gone through with. Then they would do it wrong, and hundreds of feet of film would be spoiled.

Again, just as they had successfully gone through some act, the frail ribbon of celluloid would break in the camera and it would have to be "threaded" over again. This not only delayed matters, but sometimes the same effect could not be obtained the second time.

But the boys were getting used to accidents and knew how to remedy them. Once or twice they used their automatic camera, getting good results from it.

"But I'd like to try it on those Indians," said

Joe, one day. "I wonder when we can start after them?"

"I guess soon now," said Blake. "I heard Mr. Ringold say the other day that to-morrow would finish up this particular line of dramas and then the company could have a little rest."

"That will suit us. Then we'll start for the Indian country."

Two days later the boys were told that they could have a couple of weeks off, as Mr. Hadley could take what few films were needed until that time was up.

"Then we're going up into the mountains," said the theatrical man. "We'll need you then, but in the meanwhile get after your Indians if you like—only——"

"Come back alive!" put in C. C., in solemn tones.

"We will," laughed Blake. "Come on, Joe!"

"Where to?"

"I want to find that cowboy who was tortured by the Indians and get some information from him. If we're going to start for the Indian country we want to know the best trail."

They managed to find the cowboy, who was still half an invalid from the effects of his suffering. He gave them the best information he could, and

tried to persuade them not to venture among the roving Moquis and Navajos.

"But we've got to get those pictures!" insisted Joe.

"Yes, it would never do to let Munson and his crowd get ahead of us," declared Blake. "I'm afraid we've delayed too long as it is."

"Well, good luck!" called the cowboy, who had given them a rude sort of map, showing the best route to take.

Three days later, with their camera outfits, plenty of spare film, their food, water and some other supplies, the moving picture boys started for the region where the Indians had been last heard of getting ready to do their queer dances and go through their other weird rites. Macaroni, to his secret delight, was left behind to help Mr. Hadley. He said he did not care much for Indians.

"I wonder what luck we'll have?" mused Joe, as he and his chum rode their horses along the trail, leading after them the pack-laden burros.

"It's hard telling," replied Blake. "But I'm sort of glad we've got started, anyhow. Somehow I feel hopeful."

"So do I," agreed Joe.

CHAPTER XIII

AT BIG B RANCH

"WELL, Joe, I guess it's your turn to rustle out and get some grub."

"What's that?" inquired a sleepy voice. "My turn to make coffee?"

"Yes, and get pancakes, eggs and bacon, or whatever else strikes your fancy. I'm not so very particular," and Blake Stewart yawned and stretched lazily in one of the small shelter tents he and Joe Duncan had taken with them on their trip to get pictures of the roving Indians.

"Not particular! I should say not! What do you think this is, anyhow? One of those Broadway hotels we used to eat at when we got through taking a hard lot of pictures?"

"Oh, I know what it is, all right!" exclaimed Blake. "I was only joking, Joe. If you don't feel like it I'll get the breakfast."

"You will not! If it's my turn I'll rustle the

grub for further orders. How do you like your eggs, blind or looking at you?"

"That's a new one on me," confessed the lad who had roused his chum.

"I mean do you want 'em turned over, or with the sunny side up?"

"Oh, scramble 'em, and then you won't have to worry," and then both lads burst into laughter, for eggs were one of the many luxuries that they had to do without on this trip.

They had been on the trail three days now, heading for one of the wildest parts of Arizona, whither the bands of Moquis and Navajos had taken themselves to indulge in their peculiar rites and ceremonies.

So far, the moving picture boys had had few adventures of any moment. Their way had been peaceful and they had been able to live in comparative comfort, thanks to the supplies and food they carried. They had to be sparing of their water, for though the map the cowboy had given them had several water-holes marked on it, these holes were far apart, and it would not do to go dry in between.

Their moving picture cameras had not yet been unpacked, for though they saw many strange sights and phenomena of nature, they were sav-

ing their films to get the more important pictures of the strange Indian ceremonies.

"Well, if you say so, I'll get some grub," said Joe, as he managed to crawl out of the blankets; for, though the days were hot, the Arizona nights were chilling. "I guess coffee, bread and bacon will be the bill of fare this morning, Blake."

"Just as it has been for some time past," remarked the other. "It'll be my turn to-morrow, if that's any consolation to you."

"It is, Blake. Well, I'll soon have things going," and with this Joe made a hasty toilet, started a fire of greasewood, and soon had the bacon sizzling in the pan, with the coffee pot boiling over the embers.

"We haven't seen any signs yet," remarked Blake, as they finished the simple meal and prepared to pack for the journey that day. "Not so much as an Indian feather."

"No. I'm inclined to think that they've gone farther north, into the very wildest part of this locality they can find. If they have, and if they want to make trouble for us, we'll have a sweet time sending word for help."

"Here!" cried Blake, with a short laugh. "None of that C. C. Piper business around here. Look on the bright side."

"It's all bright out here," replied Joe, referring

to the brilliant and hot sun. "If ever we do begin to take pictures they ought to be good ones, for the light is so fine."

"Yes, and everything is as clear as a crystal," added Blake. "But our first job will be to find those Indians."

"Before they find us," exclaimed Joe, with a laugh. "I haven't any ambition to be treated as that cowboy was."

"We've got two things to do," went on Blake. "Find where the Indians are hiding to do their queer dances, and——"

"Find Big B ranch," interrupted Joe. "Isn't that what you were going to say, Blake?"

"I sure was. I wonder if it could be anywhere about this region?" and, mounting to the saddle of the cow pony which he had hired for the trip, the lad gazed off across the plain.

"There doesn't seem to be anything in sight," went on Blake, as he leaped to the ground again. "Something may turn up at the last moment, however. Are you ready to hike?"

"Yes. We'll make as many miles as we can under this hot sun, and then we'll camp, and travel on again in the cool of the evening. There'll be a moon to-night and we can see our way."

"That's right. We're on a strange quest, Joe,

and I hope, even if we don't get any Indian pictures, that we find that queer man who wrote you the letter."

"So do I," and with that Joe finished packing up the last of the camp stuff; and soon the lads were journeying forward again.

They camped that noon in a little valley where, most unexpectedly, they found a water-hole that was not absolutely dry. Their horses and burros were wild at the smell of the liquid, and as they fought for vantage places Blake and Joe took turns in making moving pictures of them. They did this for two reasons. They wanted to see how the film which they carried with them would "run" in that atmosphere, and they wanted to ascertain the working condition of their cameras.

So, while Joe went about among the animals, trying to restore order, Blake took pictures, and then Joe did the same thing.

"We'll have views of ourselves if we don't of anything or anyone else," said Joe, as they started forward again.

"Yes, and we've proved that the cameras aren't much affected by this hot and dry climate," went on Blake. "Oh, if we could only spot those Indians, we would be ready for the pictures, all right!"

"That's what!" echoed Joe.

It was toward dusk when they began to think of where they would stop for the night. They had made good time over the arid region, and, as the sun was sinking behind a bank of golden and red clouds, Joe exclaimed:

"That looks like some sort of a place over there," and he pointed to the northwest.

"It is," agreed Blake. "It's some sort of a ranch, if I'm any judge; and if I don't catch the sparkle of water I'm very much mistaken. Oh, Joe! If we only could find enough water to go in swimming!"

"And rescue a lady, as C. C. Piper did," added his chum. "But that does look like water. Let's head for it. See! The animals have sniffed it already!"

As Joe spoke the ponies and burros seemed to quicken their pace, for with their never-failing instinct they had sensed the presence of water, though so far away.

Buoyed up with new hope, the boys pushed forward. There was no need to urge their steeds, for the animals were as eager as the lads themselves. As they drew nearer they could see that they were approaching a ranch, which was located in one of the few fertile valleys in that part of the country.

"Look at the cattle!" cried Blake, as they came within seeing distance.

"Yes, and there are a lot of cowboys, too. I wonder if by any chance that could be——"

Joe did not finish the sentence. He was watching Blake, who had unslung a pair of field-glasses from the case at his side. The lad was gazing earnestly through them.

"Well," asked Joe in a husky voice. "What do you make it out to be?"

For answer Blake handed him the glasses.

"By Jove!" cried Joe, a moment later. "That's it!"

"Do you see a big letter B on some of the buildings?" asked his chum.

"I sure do."

"So do I, but I wanted to make sure. Joe, we're at——"

"Big B ranch!" cried Joe. "Blake, I'm going to find out who wrote that letter, and maybe locate my folks! Come on!" and he dug his heels into his pony's sides.

CHAPTER XIV

A CATTLE STAMPEDE

With eager hearts the two lads hastened toward the buildings that marked where some cattleman had located his establishment. As they came nearer, they could more plainly make out the big letter B on many of the buildings, the owner having taken that means of distinguishing the ranch from others.

"It's the place, all right," said Joe again, and his voice was exultant. "Oh, Blake! suppose I find that Mr. Reed there, and suppose he can put me on the track of my folks!"

"It sure would be great, Joe," and his chum was as much delighted as was the lad who had most at stake. "Still, Joe, you mustn't be——" and then Blake stopped suddenly.

"What is it?" demanded Joe.

"Oh, nothing."

"Yes, there was something. You can't fool me. I can tell when you've got something on your mind. And this time I believe you were

going to tell me not to be too sure. Isn't that it?"

"Well, that was it, Joe. But——"

"Oh, well, don't worry. I'm not going to be too sure. I can stand disappointment, I guess. I've been without folks so long that a matter of a few more months won't make much difference. But I sure would like to find them. Say, they see us coming, all right."

"Yes," agreed Blake, for, as they swept up the trail leading to the ranch houses, they noticed a number of cowboys riding out to meet them, while in the background, under a shed, several men could be seen standing, holding guns in their hands.

"It looks as if they were getting ready to give us a reception," spoke Blake, with a little apprehension in his voice.

"Yes. I hope it isn't too warm a one, though. It looks as if they were ready for trouble. But what harm they expect from a couple of moving picture lads I can't imagine."

"Maybe it's this outfit we're packing along with us," suggested Blake, glancing back at the laden burros on which their cameras and other pieces of baggage were strapped. "They may take us for some peddlers."

A little later the boys were within hailing dis-

tance of the foremost of the cowboys, who rode out to meet them. One, seeming to be the leader, or foreman, raised his hand in salute, an example followed by the two lads.

"Howdy, strangers!" greeted the cow-puncher.

"Same to you," replied Blake, genially.

"Won't you 'light and come on in?" invited the cowboy. "The boss seen you coming and he thought maybe you had some news, or perhaps you might be riding for assistance. If you are we can give it to you."

"News—assistance—what for?" asked Blake, wonderingly.

"The Indians, of course. You don't mean to say you haven't heard that two bands of 'em—Moquis and Navajos—have jumped their reservations and are somewhere back in them hills, cutting up high jinks?"

"Yes, we heard that," answered Blake.

"And we're after 'em, too!" added Joe, with vigor.

"After 'em! You two lads? Say, you've got about as much chance with those imps as a jack rabbit would have with a mountain lion. If you're on the warpath after the reds you'd better talk to the boss, and maybe he'll let some of us go along to help you out. We'd jump at the chance, for some of the beggars have been rustling our cat-

tle, and we'd ask nothing better than to take it out of their hides. So, if you're after Indians, say the word and let us in on the fun, though how two such lads as you have the nerve to start off alone gets me. You sure have nerve!"

"Oh, we're only after them to get some pictures—moving pictures," said Blake quickly, seeing that the cowboy had misunderstood them. "We're representing a moving picture concern, and we want to get views of the Indians doing their odd dances. This is our outfit," and he motioned to the laden burros.

"Moving pictures!" cried the cowboy. "Listen to that, boys!" and he appealed to his fellows. "Suffering tomcats! After Indians to take their pictures! That's the limit!"

By this time the other cowboys had surrounded our two heroes, looking curiously at them and their outfits, and the whole cavalcade continued on to the ranch houses, where a man, evidently the proprietor, and several assistants, stood awaiting the arrival of the newcomers.

"We've been looking for trouble from the Indians for some time back," went on the cowboy foreman; "and when we spotted you two riding up we thought either you was the advance guard of a posse, maybe, or else that the redskins had circled around, got to the south somehow and

were trailing you. And so you're after moving pictures, eh?"

"That's it," answered Blake.

"What is it, Hank?" called a man, advancing from under the porch of the main ranch house as the party rode up. "Indians?"

"Naw, Mr. Alden—leastways, not as you mean it. These boys are out to get some moving pictures of the redskins at their crazy dances. They don't need help and they're not out on the warpath, more's the pity."

"Welcome to Big B ranch, boys!" exclaimed the proprietor, as he advanced with extended hand. "My name is William Alden, and as my foreman here, Hank Selby, says, we've been looking for trouble from those same Indians. But won't you come in?"

"Then this really is Big B ranch!" exclaimed Joe, unable to wait any longer about asking the question so important to him. "Is there a Mr. Reed here?"

"Sam Houston Reed?" asked Mr. Alden, and a smile played about his lips.

"That's the man!" cried Joe. "Is he here? He wrote me a letter—an important letter, but he never said where he was except he mentiond Big B ranch."

"I know the man you speak of," said Mr.

Alden; "and I'm sorry to say he isn't here. He's a queer sort of character, always roving about from place to place, and seldom is in one spot long. He left here some time ago, but I don't know anything about any letter he wrote you. What was it about?"

"About—about my folks," faltered Joe, undecided whether or not to tell the story. "I was hoping——"

"Say!" broke out Hank Selby, "that must have been the letter Sam was making such a fuss about a month or so back; just before he vamoosed, in fact."

"Do you know about it?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"Well, lad, not much," confessed the foreman. "One day, when the mail come in, which it manages to do once a month or so—one day, one of the boys got a magazine from the East. It was about this moving picture business, and, come to think of it, there was a piece in it about two lads who——"

"That was us," explained Blake, thinking to hasten the explanation.

"By cactus! was it now?" cried the cowboy. "Well, I never! Anyhow, when Sam Reed got hold of it, and seen them pictures, and read the names, he got excited all of a sudden. Sam was easy excited, anyhow. He muttered a lot of stuff

about thinking he knew a relative of one of the boys, and declared he was going to write a letter. But as none of us had ever seen Sam write we didn't take much stock in it. None of us paid much attention to him, as the Indians were making trouble then, and we had a lot of work on hand. That's all I know about it. And so Sam really sent you a letter, eh?"

"Yes, and we've been looking for Big B ranch since," put in Joe. "I have reason to believe that this Sam Reed could tell me about my folks," and he briefly explained matters.

"Can any of you boys help him out?" asked Mr. Alden, turning to the other cow-punchers. "Did Sam say any more to you than he did to Hank?"

"He talked with me some about it," spoke a quiet young fellow. "It was sort of rambling, but to sum it all up, it seems that at one time Sam had as a partner in a mining deal a man named Duncan. This was a wild, harum-scarum sort of chap, and he told Sam that he had a half-brother who, years ago, had lost a son, and——"

"Maybe that's me!" cried Joe, and the others looked compassionately at him. "Did he tell you anything else?" the lad asked, eagerly.

"Not much, my lad. Sam's partner was named Duncan——"

"That's my name!" interrupted Joe.

"And his half-brother's was the same," continued the cowboy. "It seems that the man who lost his son had had bad luck. He lost his wife, and in order to try to make some money he left the rest of the family—just how many I can't say —anyhow, he left them in charge of some people. Then he went mining, and when he came back, some years afterward, pretty well off, so Sam said, why he couldn't find hide nor hair of his family nor the people he left 'em with. That was Sam's story, and when he saw the pictures of the lads in the magazine and read the name he thought sure he was on the track of Nate Duncan's folks. Nate was the half-brother that Billy Duncan, whom Sam Reed knew, referred to. That's all I know."

"Then there may be other folks besides my father!" cried Joe. "I may have brothers and sisters!"

"I don't know as to that, lad," spoke the cowboy sympathetically, "but that's as Sam Reed told it to me by fits and starts. Then he must have written the letter, and it was just like him not to put on it where it was from. He probably gave it to one of the boys to mail, and land knows what post-office it started from."

"We couldn't tell," said Blake; "the postmark was almost rubbed off, and even with a strong

magnifying glass, and by photographing it, we couldn't make out where it was from."

"That was Sam Reed all over," went on Hank Selby. "He was careless. And so he invited you out to Big B ranch?"

"Yes," assented Joe.

"And never stayed here to make you welcome," put in Mr. Alden. "But you *are* welcome, just the same. Sam has been gone some time now. But come on in and have grub with us."

"I suppose we might as well, thank you," assented Joe. "I thought I was going to get on the track of my folks, but it seems I'm not. I wonder where I could locate Mr. Duncan—my father?" and he spoke the words softly.

"There's no telling, lad," said Mr. Alden. "You might hunt for a long time in this country and never come across him; and then again, he might turn up most unexpectedly. That's the way it is here. But come in."

"Maybe we can get some moving pictures of the cowboys at work," suggested Blake. "We could use those films later."

"I'll have 'em do any stunts you like," offered the proprietor of Big B ranch. "It will be a sort of diversion for 'em. We're sort of laying low, waiting to see what the Indians will do, and I'm keeping most of my cattle on nearby ranges."

"You couldn't show us any moving pictures, could you?" asked one of the cow-punchers.

"I'm sorry, but we can't," said Blake. "We'd need a projecting machine, and all we have with us are cameras for taking the films. Then, too, we'd need an electric light plant to show the pictures."

"And oil and candles are the best we can offer in the way of illumination," said Mr. Alden. "Never mind, boys," he said to his employes; "when this Indian scare is over I'll give you all time off to go to town and see a show."

"Whoop!" yelled the cowboys, as they started off on their ponies in a wild canter, swinging their hats and firing their revolvers in the air.

"That would make a good picture," declared Blake, and a little later, when they had eaten, the cowboys went through a number of their own peculiar performances for the lads, who took turns working the cameras. The method of making the moving pictures was explained, and some ordinary camera views of the cowboys were taken, Joe and Blake promising to send prints to their new friends once they got back East. They also took moving pictures of round-up, roping and branding cattle, and the like.

The boys were persuaded to remain overnight at Big B ranch, and were given a list of the

most likely places to look for Mr. Reed, who might be located at some other cattle centre.

"Well, I'm glad you dropped in on us," said Mr. Alden the next morning, as Joe and Blake were preparing to leave. "I don't want to scare you, but I'd like to warn you to look out for yourselves when you get among those Indians. They aren't to be trusted when they are fanatical over their ceremonies. Be on your guard."

"We will," promised Blake.

"And drop in to see us on your way back," urged Hank Selby.

"And if we get any news of Sam Reed or Mr. Duncan we'll keep it for you," promised the cowboy who had told Joe what he could of the clues.

The work of repacking the moving picture cameras and the rest of the boys' outfit was under way, the animals being much the better for the short rest. The cowboys had gathered around to say good-by, and the two lads were wondering what their next stopping place would be, when the quiet of the ranch was broken by a distinct rumble.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Joe.

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Alden, with a look at the cloudless sky.

The rumble and roaring sound grew, and then came a faint and distant shouting. It was

punctuated by several cracks, as if of pistol shots. At the same time a cloud of dust was observed off to the north.

"A cyclone!" yelled Blake.

"No, it's a cattle stampede!" cried Hank Selby. "Boys, get ready to head 'em off! The Indians are responsible for this, I'll wager! Get ready!"

CHAPTER XV

THE COWBOY SCOUT

INSTANTLY all the cowboys of Big B ranch were in motion. Those who were standing near their ponies leaped to the saddle, and unlimbered their big revolvers, seeing to it that their lariats were in readiness in case they might be needed.

"Mill 'em, boys! Mill 'em!" cried Mr. Alden, as he took the reins of his pony, that one of his men rushed up to him. "Get 'em going in a circle, and maybe we can hold 'em. Do you see anything of the Indians?"

"No," replied Hank Selby. "They're in back if anywhere, keeping out of sight, and sending the steers on. Oh, if I can get near the imps I'll show 'em what's what!"

He was already spurring his pony toward the big cloud of dust, followed by a number of his companions. As yet the forms of the cattle could not be seen, so enveloped in dust were they. But the thunder, as their thousands of hoofs

struck the earth, could be heard more and more plainly, and the shooting seemed to increase.

"There are some of our boys there, too," declared Mr. Alden, as he directed his men to ride so as to best intercept the oncoming herd. "I know their forty-fives. Maybe they've had a brush with the Indians."

"Joe!" cried Blake, as he ran to where the moving picture cameras were strapped on the burros. "This is our chance! We can get a real cattle stampede film, and not one gotten up for the occasion. Get busy. You take one camera and I'll take the other. We'll go to different places and I'll set the automatic in a third place. We ought to get some dandy views."

"That's right!" cried his chum. "I'm with you."

As they busied themselves to get the machines in readiness Mr. Alden saw what they were doing.

"You're right on the job, boys, I see!" he cried. "But look out! Once those cattle get started toward you scarcely anything can stop 'em. Don't get on foot, whatever you do. Your only safety is in being mounted and staying so."

"I wonder if we can work the machines from the saddle?" said Joe.

"We've got to—that's all," declared his chum, grimly. "Come on."

It was well that in making their preparations for the trip West the boys had provided themselves with a light type of camera, otherwise they would have had much trouble now.

As it was, they could easily carry the cameras on the backs of their ponies. Leaving their burros, and most of their outfits, in charge of the ranch cook, they set off to intercept the stampeding cattle.

By this time they had a glimpse of the oncoming beasts, that seemed to be headed to pass close to the ranch. It was there, fastened as securely as possible on a high post, that Blake left the automatic camera, the compressed air motor in it being set to start it going in about five minutes, in which time the lad calculated the bunch of cattle would be opposite the lens.

"You go to one side, and I'll take the other," directed Blake. "Then, no matter which way they turn, we'll get 'em. And look out for yourself, Joe!"

"The same to you, Blake!"

Off they rode, now having a good view of the thousands of steers and cows in the drove. The noise was like the rush of some great wind, or mighty torrent of water.

Suddenly Mr. Alden, and some of his men, who had ridden off to meet the onrushing cattle, came swinging back.

"We've got to turn them before they get to that low gully," yelled the ranch owner; "or they'll pile into that and half of 'em will be killed! We've got to head 'em off or mill 'em before they get there!" And riding like the wind, he and his helpers made for a certain gully about two miles from the ranch houses, firing their big revolvers as they went. They wanted, if possible, to "mill" the cattle; that is, get them going around in circles, like the motion of a millstone, thus stopping forward progress.

"Here's a good place!" cried Joe, when he had ridden a little to one side. "I'll stay here."

"I'll go a little farther on," answered Blake. They were ahead of the steers, which were advancing rapidly. Stationing themselves on either side, the moving picture boys prepared to work their cameras, and, as the first of the frightened animals swept by, the film was unreeled, making thousands of views of the novel scene.

The boys, remembering the advice of Mr. Alden, remained on their horses' backs. The cameras stood on lengthened tripods on the ground at the sides of their steeds. Fortunately the ponies were used to the sight of wild cattle,

and thus they stood with scarcely a movement, which made it possible for Blake and Joe to get good results.

By scores and hundreds the cattle swept on. Occasionally one or two would stumble and fall, only to be trampled to death by those coming after. At times there would be a break in the herd, and once or twice small bodies separated from the main mass. Once they partly divided and swept in V shape on either side of Blake. But the lad stood his ground, and, being mounted, and above the backs of the cattle, he could take nearby views with the moving picture camera.

Being anxious to get a view of the turning of the steers at the gully, Joe motioned that he was going to take a position where Mr. Alden and some of the cowboys were. Blake nodded, to show that he understood. On his part, Blake wanted to get a view of the rear of the herd, hoping he might sight some of the Indians whom Hank Selby thought responsible for the stampede.

On thundered the steers, charging wildly, and finally the last of them were in sight. But there were no Indians, though Blake saw something which interested him greatly.

For, in the flanks of some of the animals were a number of feathered Indian arrows, such as had

been used in the early days, before the redmen got firearms.

"By Jove!" thought Blake, as he noted the arrows, "I see what that means. Some of the fanatical Indians, who left the reservations to take part in the ceremonies, have their old-fashioned bows with them, and they started out to hunt these civilized cattle, just as they used to go after the buffalo. That shows that the Indians started to make a raid, I'm sure."

There was no more chance for him now to make pictures of the herd, as it was past him, and he hastened back to the ranch house, anxious to see what the automatic camera had done; he was also somewhat worried about Joe, whom he could not see.

But Joe must have had something of the spirit of the West in him, for he knew how to look out for himself. He reached a vantage point ahead of the cattle, and got some fine views of Mr. Alden and the cowboys racing across the van of the herd, and firing revolvers in the hope of turning the animals away from the danger point. They managed to do it, but only just in time, for when the cattle were started in their circular movement the ranch proprietor and his men were within a few yards of the edge of the gully. Had the cattle forced themselves into this, there would

have been a large loss of life—not only of the animals but the men themselves.

"Whew! I'm glad that's over!" exclaimed Mr. Alden, when his boys were riding around the now partly quieted steers.

"I guess yes," assented Hank Selby. "It was a close squeak. I'd like to get hold of the Indians responsible for it. I didn't see any of 'em, though."

"Maybe Blake did," suggested Joe, as he began to put away his camera.

"Hello! You here yet!" exclaimed the cowboy. "Say, you were right on the job! Get any pictures?"

"I think so; and good ones, too."

"Well, if you're plucky enough to snap a cattle stampede—you and your chum," commented Mr. Alden, "I'll back you to get some Indian views, all right. Let's get back," he added, to his foreman. "The boys can look after the cattle now."

"Say, there's something I'd like to speak to you about," went on Hank to his employer, as they rode along.

"What is it?"

"I don't like the idea of these boys riding off alone into that Indian country. They don't know much about it, though they sure are plucky lads. But they need some one of experience with 'em."

"That's right. But what's the answer?"

"Why, how would it do for me to go? Jim Rigg can take my place here."

"All right, Hank," was the quiet answer. "I believe it would be a good idea for them to have a cowboy scout along. You may go with the lads."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOREST FIRE

That Blake and Joe were delighted when they heard, a little later, that they were to have the services of one of the best cowboy scouts and guides in that part of the country, can easily be imagined.

"Of course we want you to go!" exclaimed Blake, when he heard of the plan, "but—er—that is—we don't know whether we are going to make our expenses this trip, and if——"

"Say, I'm not asking any wages!" interrupted Hank. "I want to go along for the fun of the thing, and to help you, of course. If I get a whack at those Indians I'll be satisfied. They've made trouble enough for me. I'm dead certain they started this stampede."

And later, when Blake told about seeing the arrows in the flanks of the cattle, and when the darts themselves were examined, this belief was verified.

For, from the peculiar manner in which the arrows were made, some of the older plainsmen and cowboys recognized them as the workmanship of the Moquis and the Navajos.

"It's been years, of course, since they used arrows," explained Mr. Alden; "but I suppose some of the older redmen had them on hand. They probably use them in some of their ceremonies, and when they got on the trail of my cattle they could not resist the old instinct to fire them into the steers. Of course they didn't do much damage, though I have heard stories of Indians being able to send an arrow clear through a buffalo, provided it didn't strike any bones. I don't know whether to believe it or not."

Other stories of the Indians were told by the cowboys as they rode back to the ranch houses, enough being left on guard to look after the cattle. Joe and Blake had removed the reels of exposed films from their cameras, arranging to leave the celluloid strips at the ranch until their return from the Indian country, since to carry them along might result in their being ruined. The automatic camera was found to have worked well, and it was loaded again, as were the others.

That afternoon some of the cowboys who had had charge of the stampeded cattle before they made the break came riding in from a distant

range. They gave further testimony to the effect that the Indians were responsible for the stampede, though the redmen were quickly driven off after they had started the trouble.

"There was only a small bunch of 'em," explained one of the cowboys. "They sneaked up early this morning, just as it was getting sun-up, and started to yell and fire their guns. Of course we rode for 'em, those of us who didn't take after the cattle to try and head 'em off, but it was no use. The redskins cut out some of the finest steers and rode off with 'em to the place where they're encamped, I reckon. Others kept up the mean work of stampeding the herd, and though we tried to stop the cattle we couldn't. Then we managed to drive off the Indians."

"Yes, we heard the firing," said Mr. Alden. "Well, it wasn't as bad as it might have been, yet it gave us a lot of trouble."

"And we'll give those Indians as much—if we can locate 'em!" declared Hank Selby.

"Oh, but don't forget that we want to get some pictures of the redmen going through their ceremonies," spoke Blake. "That is one of our main objects. We want to win that prize, and we want to get ahead of our rivals."

"Rivals, eh?" exclaimed the cowboy scout. "That's the first I heard of them!"

Then Blake and Joe told of the efforts of Munson and his crowd, and how the rivals had been seen in a train speeding westward.

"I only hope he hasn't gotten ahead of us," spoke Joe.

"Well, he hasn't any better chance, nor as good, as you have," declared Mr. Alden. "You're going to have one of the best guides in these parts, and if that Munson doesn't know this region, nor anything about the Indians, he's going to have his own troubles."

Owing to the excitement caused by the cattle stampede, and because Hank Selby wanted to arrange his plans for accompanying the boys, they did not start for the Indian country that day, as they had planned earlier in the morning.

"We can get off right after breakfast to-morrow," said the cowboy and scout; "and in a few days we ought to be up with the Indians."

"No telling," put in one of the cowboys who had had charge of the stampeded herd. "They're in one place one day, and miles off the next. They're roving about. I guess they haven't quite gotten settled down to go through with their dances and other ceremonies. When they do, they'll stay in one place, but it may be hard to find."

"How about the Conconino forest?" asked

Hank. "Do you think we'd locate any of 'em there?"

"You might," replied one of the cow-punchers, referring to one of the national forest reserves, occupying part of the central and northern region of Arizona. "It's a big place, though. Don't get lost in it, with a lot of fanatical Indians on your trail."

"Do you boys want to turn back?" asked Mr. Alden, with a smile, as he noted Blake and Joe exchanging glances.

"No, indeed!" they exclaimed together.

"We came out to get these pictures, and we're going to do it!" Blake went on. with an air of quiet determination.

Hank Selby completed his preparations that evening. He knew just what sort of an outfit was needed and he suggested that the boys leave behind some of the things with which they had burdened themselves, and substitute other and more useful articles.

They took his advice and, early the next morning, having bidden good-by to Mr. Alden and the cowboys of Big B ranch, the three headed for "Indian land," as Joe called it.

"If you see anything of Sam Reed, ask him more particulars about my folks, please," re-

quested Joe, and Mr. Alden promised that he would.

The boys found it much more pleasant traveling with their cowboy scout than before. Hank was a mine of information about matters Western, and he had a fund of stories which he told from time to time.

Then, too, he knew just how to make a fire with the smallest amount of wood, and how to cook, as the boys feared they never would learn.

"The less work you make for yourself out in this country, the better it is," said Hank. "It's hard enough, anyhow, at times, and you have to learn to save your strength, as well as your water and fuel. Besides, making a big fire means big smoke, and when there are a lot of crazy Indians, located you don't know where, but who have about as keen eyes as are made, you don't want to disclose your trail too plainly."

Hank knew the best route to take, so as to be reasonably sure of finding water, a prime requisite in that country. He headed for the Conconino forest, for he said it was likely that some of the Indians might be there, and, by trailing them, the moving picture boys would be led to the main body.

"There may be several bands getting ready for their ceremonies," remarked the cowboy scout.

"Some of the same tribe do things differently, and of course the Moquis and the Navajos would not be likely to pull together, though friendly enough at other times."

"What sort of things do they do?" asked Blake.

"Oh, different dances, making 'medicine,' and the like. Some call 'em one kind of a dance, and others have a different name for 'em, though it may be the same thing. The snake dance is most common, and it isn't a very pretty sight at times, though I suppose it means a lot to the Indians. Then they have ghost dances and sun dances, moon dances, green-corn dances—any excuse will do, I reckon, so they can yell, and do what they call singing. But I suppose it's interesting if you've never seen it."

"Eastern folks will be glad enough to see the moving pictures of it," declared Joe. "I only hope we can get some."

They camped that noon at a small water-hole and ate their lunch. Then, after a rest, they started off again.

"We'll make the outer edge of Conconino by night," declared Hank, after a bit. "I can just about begin to size it up now," and he pointed to a fringe of black off to the north. "The trees are there," he said.

He proved a good prophet, and that night the boys staked out their animals in the fringe of trees that marked the beginning of a large stretch of the national forest. The cowboy looked for signs of Indians having been there, or of having passed, but saw nothing.

They decided to take turns at keeping watch, and it was during Joe's spell, at about midnight, that he suddenly became aware, as he sat near the embers of the camp fire, of a distant roaring sound.

"Can that be a waterfall?" he questioned himself. "I didn't hear Hank say there was one around here."

He listened again, intently, and it seemed to him that the noise grew louder. At the same time he was aware of a breath of hot air on his cheek. Now, the day had been warm, but the nights were usually cool, and Joe wondered at this.

Then he got a whiff of smoke, that he knew could not come from their campfire.

"Something's up!" murmured the lad. "I guess I'll——"

A crackling noise interrupted him, and he saw a flash of red in the gloom of the forest.

"It's a fire!" gasped Joe. "The woods are on fire!"

CHAPTER XVII

A BIT OF FILM

JOE DUNCAN lost no time in arousing his companions. Indeed, he had scarcely to lay his hand on the shoulder of Hank before the cowboy scout was wide awake. Evidently he was used to sudden alarms.

"What is it?" he cried. "Rustlers or Indians? Are they after the cattle again? I——" Then he paused, sniffed the air suspiciously, and went on: "Oh, I thought I was back on the ranch. It's a forest fire, isn't it?"

"Looks so to me," declared Joe, and he pointed to the increasing line of red amid the blackness of the trees, on the edge of which they had made their camp.

"By Jove!" cried Blake, as he sat up, rubbing his eyes, for he was very tired and sleepy. "A forest fire! That will made a dandy film!"

"Is that all you boys think of—getting films?" demanded Hank.

"That's what we're after," replied Joe. "Why, is there any danger?"

"Danger!" exclaimed their guide. "Look at that, and say if it doesn't look like danger."

He waved his hand toward the forest. Even in the few minutes that had passed since Joe first gave the alarm, the fire had increased wonderfully fast. The area of flame was bigger, the long, bright red tongues shooting upward and licking the trees in their eagerness to devour them. The roaring sounded louder, and the hot air fanned the faces of the travelers with more vigor and intensity.

A snorting from the ponies, a sound of them straining on their tether-ropes, and the uneasy movement of the burros, told that the animals had sensed the danger.

"We've got to get out of here, and quick, too!" exclaimed Hank. "Lively, boys! Pack up and hike! That fire's coming on the run!"

"How did it happen?" asked Joe, as he began to gather up the camp stuff, while Blake ran to quiet the animals, in which he was assisted by the cowboy scout.

"Happen? It didn't happen," declared Hank. "Unless I'm mighty much mistaken the pesky Indians set this. Maybe not meaning to, for they're awful careless, and maybe they did it on

account of some of their crazy ceremonies. But she sure is burning!"

The fire was spreading rapidly. It was now so light that the travelers could see distinctly to gather up their camp outfit. It was hard work to quiet the animals, who wanted to run away from the flames, the heat and the smoke. The clouds of dusky vapor were now circling around the three travelers, and great burning embers sailed over their heads. It was difficult to breathe, too.

"It's getting hot, all right," murmured Joe, as he strapped a pack on the back of one of the burros.

"Yes, too hot for the films, I'm afraid," murmured Blake.

"Are you going to try for some pictures?" asked his chum, in some surprise.

"I sure am. I may never have another chance to snap a forest fire, and I'm going to do it. We can use some of that specially sensitive film, that exposes in the least light, for this isn't as bright as I'd like it."

"It'll be brighter soon," declared Hank, grimly. "But you boys want to be ready to run when I give the word. I wouldn't spend more than five minutes making pictures. It'll be up to us by then."

"But we are only a little way in the forest," said Joe. "We can get out in less than a minute," for they were on the very edge of the extent of trees.

"I know," assented Hank, "but that fire isn't going to stop when it gets here where the trees end. It'll keep right on through this underbrush and bushes, and burn fiercer than ever. Our only chance is to get out of its path. Say, here comes some animal!" he yelled, as there was a trampling in the brush not far from them.

"It's a bear!" cried Joe, as the shaggy creature broke from cover.

Bruin halted, surprised, evidently, by the sight of his human enemies. Then he looked back at the fire which he was running from, and, evidently deciding that man was less to be feared than the flames, on he came again, growling menacingly.

"Oh, if we could only snap him!" cried Joe.

"I'm going to!" yelled Blake. "Look after the other cameras! I've got one all ready to make some moving pictures," and, hastily taking the lightest machine, he planted himself where he could have a good view of the burning forest and began to turn the handle.

At the buzzing, clicking sound the bear started

and made a rush for the lad, being clearly outlined in the glare of the blazing trees.

"Look out!" yelled Joe, as the ponies and burros snorted in terror. "He'll get you, Blake!"

"No, he won't!" cried the cowboy, drawing his revolver.

"Don't shoot him!" begged Blake. "I want to get some more views."

"I'll only fire to scare him, then," said the guide, and he shot over the bear's head. Bruin turned with a snarl and made off in another direction, anxious now only to put as much space as possible between himself and the raging flames.

"I got some good ones!" cried Blake, enthusiastically.

"Not much more time," warned Hank. "She's a-coming on fast! I'll take the animals and get along. Come on, Joe."

"Can I help you, Blake?" asked his chum.

"No, I can manage. I want to expose a few more feet and then I'll join you. Have you got everything?"

"Yes, Blake."

"The automatic camera?"

"Sure. Better hustle along."

"No, I'm going to get a dandy forest fire scene!" and the lad continued to grind away at

the handle of the camera, while Hank and Joe struggled to lead the animals to one side.

The flames were now so near that the heat was uncomfortable. Then, too, there was danger from the falling embers carried forward by the wind, and by the heated air that hovered over the fire as above some blast furnace.

Once or twice Blake had to stop to put out little blazes that started in the leaves at his feet from these same embers. His face was hot, and he was beginning to fear for the delicate celluloid film. But he wanted just a few more pictures.

"More bears!" cried Joe, looking back, as several of the shaggy animals, evidently nearly exhausted, broke from the underbrush and darted forward.

"Yes, and other animals, too!" added Hank. "This is going to be a great fire!"

Blake, at his post, continued to snap away, getting many rare views. Joe and Hank, fortunately, found a comparatively bare and sandy place where there was little that could burn. The wind, too, had shifted somewhat, carrying the fire and smoke away from them.

"Better come!" yelled Joe to his chum, as he saw the flames creeping nearer.

"I am coming!" cried Blake, and, catching up his camera, he fled. Only just in time, too, for a

second later a mass of burning embers fell on the very spot where he had been standing.

"Come on, boys!" yelled Hank. "I've got all I can do to hold these animals! We've got to hustle!"

Detaching the tripod, which he handed to Joe, Blake managed to get to his saddle, carrying the camera. And then, with the heat at their backs, they hurried away from the fire. They took a southeasterly course, while the flames were now being driven in a northwesterly direction, somewhat back upon themselves. The wind had again shifted.

"That's the only thing that saved us," declared Hank. "If the fire had blown straight toward us we never could have gotten away from it. Those pesky Indians did it, I'm sure."

They found an elevated place and decided to pass the rest of the night there, in comparatively little danger. It was not as comfortable as their camping place had been, but this could not be helped. They were hot, tired and dirty, and were glad when morning came, so that they could find water in which to wash. In this search they were successful and soon were much refreshed.

The fire was now but a cloud of smoke, though it could not be doubted but that it was blazing fiercely to the northwest of them.

"Forward again!" cried Hank, when they had eaten breakfast, and Blake had taken the exposed films out of the cameras to insert fresh reels. "Forward once more!"

Again they were moving toward "Indian land." For two days they traveled on without any happenings of moment. They were constantly on the lookout for Indian signs, but saw none.

The fire was no longer in evidence, save for a murkiness in the atmosphere, and they changed their route so as not to again get in the path of it.

It was toward the third day of their travel that they came to a good place to camp. There was a water-hole that was well filled, and, from evidences about, it had recently been visited by a number of men and horses.

"And Indians, too!" exclaimed Hank, as he looked at the marks in the moist ground. "Boys, we're on the right trail at last, I do believe. Indians have passed here not many days ago."

Blake, who was looking about, suddenly stooped over and picked up something from the ground. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Joe.

For answer his chum held it out.

"A piece of celluloid film from a moving pic-

ture camera!" murmured Joe. "Did you drop it, Blake?"

"No, I couldn't.

"Why?"

"It isn't the kind we use," was the quiet answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE TRAIL

Joe stared at his chum. The cowboy scout looked at both lads. They had come to a halt, and the only noise was that caused by the animals as they swung their heads, or stamped to rid themselves of the flies.

"It—it isn't our film?" repeated Joe, questioningly.

"No," answered Blake. "It's the same size, of course, for it fits the standard cameras, but it isn't the make we use. Besides, Joe, we haven't been here before. We couldn't have dropped it."

"Then——" began the other lad, but ere he had framed the question he was able to answer it himself:

"Munson!" he exclaimed, in a low voice.

"Exactly," replied Blake.

"What's the answer?" inquired Hank, not exactly understanding the talk.

"Our rivals," explained Blake. "The ones we told you about. They've been here, and not long

ago, either, for this film is fresh. It shows that they're after the same thing we are—and are ahead of us."

"Hum!" mused the cowboy. "That looks bad. But I tell you one thing. Sometimes it isn't the first one on the ground who gets what he wants —from an Indian. They're queer creatures, these savages, and often they'll do the most unexpected things. Even if Munson got ahead of you, that's not saying he'll get the pictures he's after. The redmen may chase him to kingdom come, and you might come along the next minute and get all the pictures you wanted.

"Of course, that's not saying you will," he hastened to add; "for they might treat you the same way as they did the other fellows. But I wouldn't go to feeling bad just because you've seen signs that your rivals are ahead of you."

"I'm glad to hear that," spoke Blake.

"So am I," added Joe. "It sure did give me a bad feeling when Blake sprung that piece of film," and he looked curiously at the bit of celluloid. It was a section of unexposed film, of the size and character used by the moving picture boys themselves, with the perforations on the edges. Blake's quick eye had seen some small differences in it which told him that it was not the make they used in their cameras.

"They perhaps had an accident," went on Blake; "and maybe their camera fell, and came open, and they had to throw away a whole reel. This might have broken off and blown here."

"Yes," spoke Joe; "and they may have been taking pictures, and their film may have broken. Then they'd have to tear off a piece and thread it over again in the machine."

"That's possible, of course," spoke Blake. "But, however it was, it shows that they're ahead of us, and we've got to be on the lookout."

"Well," remarked the cowboy scout; "here's about as good a place to camp as we'll likely find, and we might as well make ourselves comfortable. The Indians are ahead of us, that's one good thing. I can tell that by the signs. And if you say that bit of stuff shows that your rivals are in the lead, that's another sign, I take it. And I'd a heap sight rather have 'em ahead of me than in back."

"Why?" asked Joe, as he began to take some of the packs off the burros.

"Why? Because we don't have to be on the watch for 'em to sneak up on us in the night. They'll hardly come back here to look for us, and we can get some rest, after being on the move so long, and not getting much sleep. Yes, boys, of course it isn't exactly fun to know that your

rivals are on the job ahead of you, but don't worry. I'll bank on you lads every time. And now let's have grub and make camp," and with this philosophical reflection the cowboy scout leaped from his pony and approached one of the pack burros.

It did not take long, under the experienced direction of Hank Selby, to prepare for the night. The animals were picketed out, though there was not much forage for them; a fire was made, and soon bacon was sizzling in the pan, while the aromatic smell of coffee scented the evening air.

Then the simple camp preparations were made. Blankets were spread out, a rubber one going down first, to take away the effects of the dampness; for, though the climate was hot and dry in the daytime, there was often a heavy dew at night, and colds were not things to be despised. Small shelter tents were carried, for the same reason, and when these were stretched, and the boys and their cowboy friend crawled under them, with a small fire at their feet, they felt that there were many situations far more uncomfortable than this sort of camping.

"I do hope we can soon get up to the Indians," remarked Joe. "I don't like the idea of Munson and his crowd being ahead of us, even if you do say, Hank, that the redmen may not let him

photograph them. I'm afraid he'll get the bulge on us, and win that prize."

"It's possible, of course," admitted Blake; "but I'm not going to do the C. C. act and anticipate trouble."

"Who's C. C.?" inquired the cowboy, in a sleepy voice.

"Our gloomy comedian," replied Blake, giving a description of Christopher Cutler Piper, at which Hank laughed.

"I wonder what he and the others are doing now?" mused Joe. "And Macaroni, too," he went on. "He's our helper, but he's rather timid, and we were afraid he'd bolt just when we were getting some pictures of the Indians at their wild dances. That would spoil things."

"That's right," admitted Hank. "Some of the rites they go through are enough to scare anyone. But I'm going to snooze. Good-night!"

All three were soon slumbering, glad of the chance to rest. The night was peaceful, calm and still, and Blake, who awakened once or twice, could not help contrasting the peacefulness of their present situation with what it might be soon, when they arrived at the camping place of the religion-crazed Indians.

Then the lad fell into slumber again, to be awakened some time after midnight by a peculiar

noise. At first he could not tell what it was, for it sounded like a gurgle, as if some person or animal was drinking deeply. Then came various sniffs and snuffs, and the sound of teeth chewing.

"I wonder if Joe can be up, making a midnight lunch?" thought Blake, for his chum was sometimes in the habit of doing this. "If he is I'll call him down," went on the lad. "We haven't got so many rations that he can eat between meals."

He peered from his small shelter tent—there was one for each—and at first could make out nothing. Then, as the dying embers of the campfire sent forth a flickering blaze, Blake saw, by the flare of it, a big shape hovering over the place where the camp supplies had been placed.

"An Indian!" he exclaimed, and he was on the point of yelling an alarm, when the shape reared up, and disclosed itself to be a bear.

"Get out, you brute!" cried Blake, tossing a stone in the direction of bruin. "Leave our stuff alone!"

The rock must have hit the bear, for it grunted and shuffled off in the darkness with several "whoofs" of protest.

"What is it? What's the matter? Are we attacked?" yelled Hank, shoving himself out of his tent, with his ever-ready revolver in hand.

"Is it Munson or the Indians?" cried Joe. "If it is—look out!" and before they could stop him, or call a warning, he had fired his rifle in the air.

"Say, don't do that!" expostulated Blake, when the echoes had died away. "You might shoot somebody."

"That's what I wanted to do," explained Joe, as he crawled out and stood upright. "Did I drive 'em off?"

"There he goes—a bear after some of our stuff," explained Blake, pointing to the moving shadow, now some distance off. "You didn't come within a mile of him, Joe."

"Huh! I didn't aim. I might have hit him if I had tried."

"That's just it," said Hank, gravely. "You want to see the thing you're shooting at in this country. Besides, it's rather risky to be giving a needless alarm in that fashion. No telling how near some of the Indians may be—or those rivals of yours."

"I—I won't do it again," said Joe. "But when Blake gave the alarm I just plugged away."

"Did he do any damage?" asked the cowboy, as he walked over to the pile of camp stuff, and spoke soothingly to the animals, who were mov-

ing about uneasily, having whiffed the odor of the bear.

"I guess not much," answered Blake. "I shied a rock at him, as soon as I found out what it was. But he sure did scare me first."

A casual examination did not disclose much damage done, but in the morning it was revealed that the bear had broken open a package of sugar. It was his chewing on this, and afterward getting a drink of water, that had probably awakened Blake.

They took up the trail soon after breakfast, the cowboy pausing now and then to look for signs of Indians.

"See anything?" asked Blake, as he noted the scout shaking his head somewhat despondently.

"The sign is middling scarce," replied Hank. "It was good, back there near the water-hole, but now it seems to have disappeared. However, we'll keep on this way. It's likely some of the Indians have been making for a big mesa off this direction. I've heard tell that in years back they used to hold dances and other doings there, on that elevated table-land, and they may have gone back to it. We'll keep on this trail."

"Any evidence of those other moving picture men?" inquired Blake, for of course he and Joe

were not as adept in reading the signs of the trail as was Hank.

"No, I can't see anything," was the answer. "But then this isn't exactly good ground for the leaving of signs. We may come to some more later. Meanwhile we'll keep our eyes open."

CHAPTER XIX

INDIAN SIGNS

"See anything, Blake?"

"Well, I do, and I don't," was the answer of the lad, who was peering through a pair of powerful field glasses. "That's a mesa, all right, just as Hank said we might expect to see about now, but whether it's the one he meant I don't know."

"Let me have a peep," suggested Joe. "Do you see any signs of Indians?"

"Well, there's something moving about among the foothills," went on Blake, as he passed the glasses to his chum; "but whether they're Indians, cowboys, stray cattle, or ponies, I can't say. Let's have your opinion."

It was the second day after they had left the water hole where the bear had given them the scare. They had pushed along the trail, but the most careful search had failed to reveal any signs of the redmen of whom they were in search.

"What do you make of it, Joe?" asked Blake,

when his chum had spent over a minute in peering through the powerful glasses.

"Well, Blake, I'd like to think they were Indians, moving about like that, for it would mean we were near the end of the trail. But, at the same time, I'd hate to be disappointed. As you say, they may be stray cattle. We'll be nearer toward sundown to-night, and then we can make 'em out better—if they stay there. Let's push on."

"No, Hank told us to wait for him here."

"But he may be a good while coming back. Besides, he rode off ahead, anyhow, and we may meet him. He can easily follow our trail, for the ground here is soft."

"No," decided Blake. "He told us to stay around here, and we'd better do it until he gets back. He said he wouldn't be long, and he must have had a reason for wanting us to stick."

"All right, just as you say; but we could get nearer to the mesa and make out what those things are."

"There's time enough, I guess," responded Blake, as he took back the glasses. Once more he peered through them, but shook his head again. He could not make out what the moving objects were.

"I wonder where Hank is?" asked Joe, after

a pause, and he rose in his stirrups to get a better view.

"He said he was just going to prospect around," remarked Blake; "and see if he could pick up any better trail than the one we've been following. He wouldn't have to find much of a one to beat this," he added; "that is, as far as signs go, for we haven't seen one since we found the bit of film at the water-hole. Hank said he'd circle about a bit. He ought to be back soon."

"Well, if we've got to wait much longer I may as well take it a bit easy," spoke Joe, and, dismounting, he sought the shade of a big rock near which they had halted.

"And I think I'll overhaul that camera that fell off the burro yesterday, and see if it's damaged," spoke Blake, as he put away the glasses. There had been a slight accident the previous day, when one of the burros stumbled and fell, something unusual for the sure-footed little beasts. One of the moving picture machines had been dislodged, and had fallen, but at the time it was not examined, and since then they had pushed on so rapidly that there was no time.

Now, since Hank had called a morning halt, that he might prospect about for signs, Blake thought it a good opportunity to look over the mechanism.

"We want to be ready to film anything good that we meet up with," he said to Joe; "and lots of times good subjects won't wait for you to thread up the celluloid."

He took the camera from the burro's back, and gave it a thorough inspection. Then, to make sure that it was in working order, he set it up on the tripod and focused it on Joe, for want of a better subject.

"Want me to look pleasant?" asked his chum with a laugh.

"Sure. I'm not going to snap you, but as long as I've gone this far I may as well put in a loaded reel, so as to be ready on the jump if anything happens."

Joe did not answer. He was again looking over the queer letter sent to him by Sam Reed, and speculating as to whether or not he would ever find the odd character who might be able to give him knowledge of his father, of whom he had so unexpectedly heard.

"I sure do wish I could locate him," mused Joe. "I didn't know how much I wanted folks until I heard of this chance. And now it seems as if I was as far from having any as ever. Well, maybe I'll run across 'em some day!"

With a sigh he replaced the letter in his pocket. He always carried it with him, and, ever since

locating Big B ranch, he had been hoping against hope that he would find Mr. Reed. But that individual seemed to have vanished. Inquiries of the few persons they had so far met on the trail had resulted in nothing.

"Does she work all right?" asked Joe, as he saw Blake turning the handle of the moving picture camera.

"Yes. One of the cog wheels was out of order, but I got it fixed. I'm all ready now, to snap anything that comes along. I guess Hank——"

Blake was interrupted by a series of yells, accompanied by the snorting of a pony, and growls. At the same time the boys' steeds and pack animals exhibited various signs of fright.

"Something has happened to Hank!" yelled Joe, jumping up and making a dive for his rifle.

"Look! Look!" cried Blake. "Say, this couldn't have happened better. I'm going to film that!"

"Well, for the love of cactus!" exclaimed Joe. He stopped short and gazed toward where his chum pointed.

With whoops and yells, Hank Selby was racing for the temporary camp, his pony covering the ground in big jumps, and, coming after the cowboy, at good speed, was a big bear, uttering indignant "whoofs!" at every jump.

"Get me, boys!" yelled Hank, who did not seem at all alarmed. "Get a picture of Mr. Bear if you can. I disturbed him in his slumbers and I led him this way as a surprise for you. He's so old he hasn't any teeth, I reckon, but it will make a good picture. Can you get it?"

"Sure," answered Blake, who, fortunately, had his camera pointed exactly right. He was already grinding away at the handle, and the clicking of the mechanism told that the film was running, and pictures being made.

"I'll swing him around," said the cowboy. "I made him mad by hitting him on the nose with a rock, and he took after me. Then I thought of your cameras that you hadn't had a chance to use in some days. Whoop! Here I come. Get me!"

"I'm getting you!" answered Blake. "Joe, stand by with your gun to give him a salute if he comes this way."

"Sure!" assented his chum. But there was little danger of bruin taking his attention away from the cowboy, and with almost comical anger he pursued him. The ponies and the pack beasts, scenting the bear, had run off some little distance.

Hank's animal was a good and speedy one, and, what is more, was not afraid of bears, having

been used for hunting. It could easily keep ahead of bruin, and Hank, knowing this, led the infuriated bear a chase so that Blake could get a novel series of moving pictures.

"How are they coming?" asked the cowboy, as he circled about, causing the bear to take such a quick turn that he went over in a somersault.

"Good!" cried Blake. "This is as good as a circus. But I've got about all I want. I can't use much more film, if we're to get any Indian pictures."

"One more round!" yelled Hank, laughing. "I'll let him get close to me, and then I'll give him just a shot to scare him off."

He slowed up his pony, and the bear, with an angry growl, came on with a rush. Blake was working the handle industriously, and when bruin got quite close enough Hank gave him a bullet where it would do little harm.

The bear stopped short, growled with pain and surprise, and then, turning, made off at top speed, the film registering his every movement.

"Well, how's that for a diversion?" asked Hank, when the beast was out of sight among the rocks.

"Fine!" answered Blake, as he began packing away the camera again. "That will make a dandy film."

"I may not know much about moving pictures," went on the cowboy; "but I can furnish subjects on short notice," and he chuckled with grim humor as he dismounted from his pony.

"How did it happen?" asked Joe, wishing he had had a shot at the beast, but on the whole rather glad that the animal had been gotten rid of so easily.

"Oh, I was just prospecting about a bit," replied Hank; "when I came upon him in the rocks. Just for fun I heaved a stone at him, and it hit him on the nose. He was ready for trouble, and when I started to ride off, knowing I could easily outdistance him, I thought of leading him up here so you could snap him."

"I'm glad you did," spoke Blake, explaining how he happened to have the camera ready.

"Well, I didn't see any signs," went on Hank. "I guess we might as well travel."

The ponies and burros were brought up, packs were looked to, and once more the trail was taken up. All that day they traveled on, with no results. They did meet a small party of prospectors, and of them inquired about the Indians. But these men had seen nothing, though they had heard that the redmen were not far off. Of them, too, Joe inquired about Sam Reed, but, though one of the prospectors had heard of this queer

character, he did not, nor did any of the others, know where the man might be found.

On the morning of the second day after the incident with the bear, they had drawn considerably closer to the mesa near which the boys had seen the moving objects. They had mentioned them to Hank, who could only guess at what they might have been, since when he looked, after driving off the bear, they had disappeared.

"We'll soon see what's there," said the cowboy. "We ought to make the mesa by night, though it's farther than it looks on account of the clear air."

They had ridden on for perhaps an hour when Hank suddenly pulled in his pony. The next minute he had leaped to the ground, and picked up something.

"What is it?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Indian sign!" was the answer, and the cowboy held up part of a worn moccasin. "Boys, we're getting close now!"

CHAPTER XX

THE SECRET VALLEY

"THEN the Indians have been here!" exclaimed Joe, after a moment's silence, during which Hank had been examining the moccasin closely.

"That's what," answered the cowboy.

"And can you tell how recently?" asked Blake.

"Well, that's a little difficult," went on Hank. "But I should say this was a fresh sign, if I'm any judge. I'm going to look for more," and pulling the reins of his pony over the animal's head, as a signal that the beast was not to wander, the cowboy began casting about for further evidence of the presence of the redmen.

"Here's more!" he exclaimed, as he picked up a bit of gaudy blanket, and, a little farther on, located some bead trimming, and a broken arrow.

"They sure have been here," he continued, "and quite a party of 'em, too. I'm glad to find these things, because they show that we haven't been far wrong. We're on the right trail, and have

been, though of course that's not saying that we're going to locate the imps right soon."

"Were there many of 'em?" asked Blake, as he, too, jumped off his pony and began circling about.

"Quite some, I should say," answered the cowboy, as he noticed in the earth marks that were all but invisible to the moving picture boys. "There's been a party of young bucks out here, as well as some of the old timers."

"How can you tell that?" asked Joe.

"Because of this arrow," replied Hank. "None of the younger Indians would carry bow and arrows. It's only the old ones who would do that, probably some of the medicine men who use them in their ceremonies. The young chaps would have shotguns and rifles. Some of 'em may have kept 'em after having been with some Wild West show, coming back to their reservation to take part in the annual ceremonies."

"And why do you imagine they were here?" asked Joe.

"Well, it's my notion," said Hank slowly, as he looked over the ground for more evidences of the recent presence of the Indians; "it's my notion that the whole body of 'em, or, maybe, a large part of 'em, are camped somewhere around here, getting ready for their cut-up work.

"Naturally they'd want to know if they were in any danger of being surrounded by the soldiers or anyone else, and likely to be driven back to their reservations.

"So they have probably been sending out scouting parties to see what's going on. Naturally the older Indians would go with the young fellows to make sure everything was all right, and it was some such party as that which was here.

"I guess, after what I've found, that those were Indian ponies you saw at the foot of the mesa the other day. Boys, if all goes well we ought soon to be at their camp."

"Then we've got to be cautious," said Blake. "If what we've been told is so, they won't welcome us with open arms. And if we want to get some moving pictures we've got to do it on the sly."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Hank. "We've got to move cautious-like from now on. Of course we may be spotted any time, and the alarm given, for there isn't much cover around here, until we get into the foothills, and those Indians may have sentinels on the lookout in all the high places. But we'll have to take our chances."

For some time further the boys and their cowboy scout circled about, looking for more Indian signs. They found some, at a distance from the

place where they had discovered the half-worn moccasin.

"They must have come out here to prospect a bit," was Hank's opinion; "and then they went back to their camp. Well, we'll follow 'em, but I think we'll do most of our traveling at night now. There's a good moon, and it will be more comfortable. Besides, we won't run such risks of being discovered."

The boys thought this a good plan to follow, and, after making camp that noon, near a half-dried water course, they remained there until night, when they again took up the trail.

But if the boys imagined that they were soon to come upon the Indians in their camp, and discover them at their ceremonies, they were sadly disappointed.

They traveled all that night, with occasional stops for rest, but when morning came they were no nearer the redmen than before, if signs went for anything. There was no further evidence of the Indians on the trail and no indication that the rivals of the moving picture boys were in the locality, though Joe and Blake did not believe that Munson and his crowd had given up the attempt to get some films.

A strange part of the journey was the fact that they could not seem to get near to the mesa. They

had been headed for it, but the trail suddenly branched off, and, though they could have kept straight on, Hank did not think it advisable.

For, on getting to within a certain distance, the character of the ground suddenly changed. It was so rough, so broken up with cross gullies, so strewn with great boulders and such uncertain footing for the animals, that Hank had counseled making a swerve to one side.

"We may find an easier trail," he said. "I don't like the idea of getting in there with our outfit. If anything should happen that we had to get out in a hurry, we couldn't do it. We would be caught in a trap."

The boys agreed with him, and so a detour had been made, but with no good results. It seemed that the mesa was not approachable from any side.

"That's probably the reason they picked it out," said the cowboy. "They know how to get to it, but we don't, and once the Indians are there they know they are pretty safe."

"But if they got to it we ought to be able to," said Blake, who was not one that gave up easily.

"We could, if we could find the passage," assented Hank. "Of course it's possible to cross this broken ground, and reach it that way, but I don't like to chance it. I've never been in this

locality before, and I don't know what we might stack up against. We'll just hunt around for a more likely spot."

They made camp as the sun was coming up, and prepared to stay in a fairly sheltered spot until it was again night, when they would press forward once more.

There were two advantages about this mode of travel. It was more comfortable, for they were out of the hot sun; and they were less likely to be discovered. Though it was not to be doubted, if they were near any Indians, that the cunning redmen knew of the presence of the whites.

Another night brought them no nearer their objective point. They seemed to be kept away from the mesa by an invisible barrier, though it was evident enough in the wild and rugged nature of the country lying all around it. Hank would not trust himself and the boys to cross the stretch where an attack would mean great danger.

"We'll just keep on looking," he said. "Of course if we tried it by daylight we might have better luck, but it wouldn't be altogether safe."

That night, as they journeyed onward, they saw the reflection of strange gleams in the sky.

"Northern lights!" exclaimed Joe.

"Never!" cried Blake. "Not at this time of year, nor so far south. What are they, Hank?"

"Indian signal fires," was the quiet answer. "Boys, we're getting closer, and it must be that the imps are getting ready for their big ceremony. If only we could find the way of getting to that mesa."

And they did find it most unexpectedly.

They came to a halt that morning, in pursuance of their plan to travel only at night. As Joe was staking out the horses near the little stream where they had halted, he approached a group of rocks amid which thick underbrush was growing. He saw a particularly long and smooth stick that he thought would come in handy for a whip, and as he reached for it he nearly stumbled and fell.

Recovering himself by grasping the bushes, he looked down, and as he did so he uttered a cry of surprise.

"Look here!" he shouted. "I've found a secret valley, and I think it leads right up to the mesa!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE GHOST DANCE

INSTANTLY Blake and Hank were at Joe's side.

"By Jove, you have found it!" cried the cowboy.

"And no one would ever suspect that it was there," went on Blake. "You can't see it until you get right on the edge."

"And I might have slid down it if I hadn't grabbed the bushes," spoke Joe. "I was nearly gone as it was."

"I see how it is," said the cowboy, as he looked down into the valley. "It's filled with mist, and the sudden descent doesn't show as plainly as it will later. Otherwise we would have spotted it before. But it's the secret way to the mesa, that's sure. Now, the question is, what's to be done?"

The three stood on the verge of a steep incline, leading down into a mist-filled valley. It was

this very mist that had prevented them from seeing the trail until Joe discovered it by accident.

They had traveled along a level plain, a sort of plateau, and were now at the end of it. Descending abruptly from this was a long, narrow valley, and the spot where Joe had nearly fallen led into it by means of a sort of gully, sloping sharply down.

What the valley contained they had yet to discover, for by some peculiar freak of nature the depression was filled with a thick fog, that was not present on the higher ground.

"Well, boys," remarked Hank, "I guess we've arrived all right. Now the question is, what's next to be done? I'm certain the Indians are down there, but how many of them, how they are feeling, and whether it's safe for us to venture in, are things I can't answer."

"I think we'd better wait," counseled Blake. "The mist will blow away when the sun gets higher, and we can see where we're at. Then we may be able to pick out some place where we can get to without the Indians seeing us, and set up our cameras. If we can get the pictures without the Indians knowing it, even though they might prove friendly, so much the better."

"And we haven't seen a sign of our rivals," spoke Joe, with delight.

For answer Blake stooped down and picked up a small cog-wheel. It was part of a moving picture camera, one of the wheels that helped move the film by means of the perforations.

"They're ahead of us," he said simply. "Our rivals."

"Oh, what luck!" cried Joe. "And I thought we had 'em beaten."

"Well, we may yet," said Blake coolly. "This is one of the spare cog-wheels they probably carried, and they dropped it in going down into the valley. That shows they are ahead of us, but it's no sign we can't beat 'em out."

"That's the way to talk!" cried Hank. "Never give up! Now let's consider things. We've got to get down into that valley, and we don't want the Indians to see us if we can help it. The chances are that your rivals are there ahead of you. You don't want them to see you if you can help it. What's the answer? Why, we've got to go down there at night, that's all."

"But we can't take moving pictures at night," objected Joe. "That is, unless we have a brighter light than the moon. And that's out of the question here. Besides, a light would give us away."

"I only said go *down* there by night," remarked Hank. "If you get a good place you can focus the cameras and take the pictures when the Indians

are dancing. They'll do that by daylight, I fancy —at least most of it."

"That's what we want," said Joe.

"Exactly," echoed Blake.

They remained for a few minutes gazing down into the mist-filled valley. Then, in order that they might not be spied upon by any Indian sentinels, they tethered their animals out of sight, amid the small growth of trees, and made their camp.

Before this was finished, the wind sprang up and the fog in the valley began swirling about.

"It will soon clear," said Blake.

He was right. Ten minutes later glimpses could be had of the bottom of the valley, showing it to be long and narrow, and of considerable depth.

"We soon ought to see some signs of the Indians, if they are there," said Blake after a pause, when they had eaten breakfast, and stood in a sheltered spot gazing down into the valley.

"And maybe Munson and his crowd," added Joe. "It's queer they should get there ahead of us, and we not see anything of them except that piece of film, until we spot that cog-wheel."

"Not strange, when you consider that they would naturally do their best to hide their tracks," replied Blake.

"And also that we've been traveling nights of late," added the cowboy. "We haven't had a good show at reading their signs."

"But we'll soon see what's doing," put in Joe. "The mist seems to keep on blowing away. I believe I can make out something moving down there."

"Then keep back," advised the cowboy guide. "They may spot us as soon as we do them, and we don't want them to know we're here."

They all dropped down flat on the ground, peering over the edge of the odd trail that led down into the mysterious valley. The wind became stronger, and the mist swirled, now this way and then that. The watchers could make out some sort of movement going on down below them, but what it was they could not determine. Whether it was some hidden bunch of cattle, a herd of ponies, or the Indians, was yet to be decided.

Then, like a curtain lifting from some picture, the mist blew completely away, and from the watchers came a cry of surprise. For below them lay the valley, literally filled with Indians!

"We've found them!" exclaimed Blake softly.

"That's what," agreed Joe.

"And they're getting ready for their ceremonies, too," added the cowboy. "See, they're set-

ting up bowers, lodges and what-not there on the plain. There'll be high doings to-night and to-morrow."

"Oh, if we can only get down there to make the pictures!" murmured Blake. He was anxious to do this, not only for the sake of the prizes, but because of the reputation he and Joe would acquire from having filmed a scene of such historical interest.

"Oh, we'll get there," said Hank. "But we've got to keep close until after dark."

All day long they remained in concealment on the brink of the valley. They were not observed, as far as they could make out, though hidden sentinels might have spied them.

The Indians went about the preparations for their ceremonies most unconcernedly. They came and went, silently for the most part, though now and then some young brave would let out a yell. From the far end of the valley other bodies of the redmen entered from time to time, while some went out. Evidently it was a gathering of the tribes, in preparation for some important rites.

"This is only a small part of the Indians," said Hank, after roughly counting how many there were. "Some of 'em must be in other places doing the same thing. Well, it will soon be dark."

The watchers ate a cold meal, so as not to have to make a fire, the smoke of which might attract attention. Everything was in readiness for the attempt to get down into the valley to some spot where, on the morrow, pictures might be taken from cover.

As the shadows lengthened, the activities among the Indians down in the valley increased.

"They'll be so busy they'll never notice us," said Hank. "I guess we'll be safe all right, if we can manage to keep hid. Are you all ready, boys?"

"Yes," answered Blake, wishing it were possible to make moving pictures by artificial light.

Supper was finished. It began to get dark, though later there would be a full moon. They were all ready to descend as soon as it was a little darker.

Suddenly Hank, who was on watch at the edge of the descent, uttered a cry.

"Come here, boys!" he called.

Joe and Blake pressed to his side, and beheld a curious sight. The Indians had gathered in a compact mass about a central fire. They began to circle slowly about, and to utter weird cries. Then, from one of the lodges, or bowers, made of tree branches and skins, there came a figure

dressed all in white. At the sight of it the Indians set up a great shouting.

"What is it?" asked Joe.

"The beginning of the ghost dance," answered Hank. "I guess we can start moving now."

CHAPTER XXII

GETTING THE PICTURES

FASCINATED, the boys, from their hiding place, watched the strange rites of the ghost dance. The howling of the Indians had fallen to a low murmuring chant, though now and then one of the braves would break into a wild yell.

Then would come a rattle of their rude skin-made drums, probably relics from the ancient days when war dances were held. Again their voices would become low and plaintive.

All this while the white figure circled in and out among the Indians, the fire flickering on the ghostly garment in which it was wrapped. This figure seemed to be receiving the homage of the Indians, and now and then, as Joe and Blake looked, they could see a white arm shoot out and touch some figure.

"What do you suppose that's for?" asked Blake, in a low voice.

"It looks as if they were being paralyzed,"

remarked Joe. "They keel over as soon as the ghost touches 'em."

"No, it isn't that," said Hank. "I've heard about this dance. It seems that whoever the ghost touches has to go and make some sort of a sacrifice by himself—maybe half starve himself to death, or jump through a fire, or tie his arm up in cords until the circulation nearly stops—all sorts of foolishness, but which means a lot to them, I reckon. Say, but there's a pile of 'em, though, boys!"

As he spoke the number of Indians about the fire was suddenly increased, scores of warriors running out from other tents or bowers, and some coming from the shadows, where their hiding places could not be made out by our friends.

"What are these, Moquis or Navajos?" asked Blake.

"Moquis, if I'm any judge," replied the cowboy. "They're comparatively harmless when they're in their right minds, but when they get inflamed with the passion of their religious dances, they don't know what they are doing. It would be as much as a man's life was worth to interfere with 'em under certain circumstances. But I guess now is as good a time as any to begin to go down to that valley, boys," and he added this last as coolly as though he had merely pro-

posed a pleasant little picnic, totally at variance with his previous ominous words.

"All right!" exclaimed Blake, gamely. "I'm ready."

"The same here," added Joe. "But if we take our whole outfit down there, ponies, burros and all, we're going to make quite a racket."

"We won't take it all," said Hank. "I planned that part out while I've been watching here. Though I do believe that when they get a little wilder, as they will after a bit, we could go down with all our stuff and not be noticed. However, we won't take any chances. We'll leave the animals here, pack our guns, some grub and water and your machines on our backs, and pick out a good hiding place, where we can see the ceremonies. They won't go nosing around much to-morrow, so there's very little danger of 'em locating us. Now let's see what we need to take."

"I do wish I could be getting some of those pictures," murmured Blake, longingly, as he looked down into the valley and saw the Indians at their strange rites. "A good film of this would surely win a prize."

"Oh, you'll have plenty of chances to-morrow, son," declared Hank. "This is only the preliminary. They'll be twice as wild and weird in the morning, and, though they may not give the

ghost dance, seeing that's naturally a night affair, they'll do some other ceremonies that'll be well worth while filming, as you call it—that is, if folks like such pictures. As for me, give me a football game, or a ballroom scene, every time."

"Indeed these pictures will be valuable—if we get them at all," said Joe. "They'll be just what the geographical society wants. I only hope Munson and his crowd haven't gotten ahead of us."

"We haven't seen any trace of 'em," observed Hank, drily; "and if they're down in that crazy bunch now, I wouldn't give much for their chances of a healthy time. Wow, look at that!" he exclaimed, as the antics of the Indians became more wild. They were fairly rolling over each other on the ground now.

It was a good time to make the attempt to descend into the secret valley, since the attention of the redmen was wholly centered on their peculiar rites.

The horses and burros were tethered with long ropes, near where they could get good grazing and water for a day at least, since the moving picture boys, and their guide, planned to come up to the level again the following night to renew their stock of provisions, and other supplies, in case they wished to devote two days to getting

the films. Then the horses could be moved to other grazing spots.

The cameras were not excessively heavy to carry, though with their rifles and revolvers, spare ammunition, food and water each one had a big enough load as the descent into the valley was begun.

"But we've got to be prepared for emergencies," said Hank; "and shooting-irons and cartridges are prime requisites here."

"Why, do you think they'll attack us?" asked Blake.

"They might—if they see us," was the cool response. "But don't worry. We'll pick out a safe place to make a stand, and I'm a pretty good shot."

"But do we need so much food and water?" asked Joe, for seemingly an unusual quantity was being taken along.

"We do," said Hank simply. "I'll tell you why —later, if I have to," and he paused significantly. Though the boys thought they detected a note of anxiety in his voice, they did not want to ask his reason. Sometimes, they thought, it was best not to know or to anticipate the worst.

Slowly and cautiously they began the descent. They soon were made aware that they had little to fear from discovery by the Indians, unless it

was at the hands of some lone wandering brave. But this was unlikely, since it was probable that all the warriors would be at the dance, or else so worn out by their fierce exertions, in taking part in other ceremonies, that they would be glad to crawl off somewhere and rest.

So it was with comparatively easy minds that our friends made their way down the slope into the valley. The moon was just beginning to come up, and they wanted to get to some hiding place before the silver rays were stronger, since their movements might thus be betrayed.

"If only I could get some pictures of this!" murmured Blake, as he moved forward, now and then glancing over to where the dancers were capering about, getting more and more wild and frenzied every minute. Their cries, groans, howls and shrieks sounded louder now, and it was evident that the ceremonies were approaching a climax.

"Yes, it's a pity we can't take pictures at night," agreed Joe; "but a flashlight is out of the question."

"I guess it is—if you want to keep on your scalp," chuckled Hank, grimly.

"How far are we going?" asked Blake, when they had tramped on for some time, and were getting down to the floor of the valley.

"Not much farther," said Hank. "I spotted what I thought would be a good place when I was roaming about up above this afternoon. It ought to be somewhere around here."

"We ought to be up on some elevation, so as to get good pictures," spoke Joe.

"That's the kind of a spot I looked for," went on the cowboy guide. "About ten steps more—no, here it is, by cactus! We were nearer to it than I thought. Now, boys, crawl in here, and in the morning you can poke the nose of your cameras out through the bushes, and get all the films you want. Now, I'm going to turn in, for we may—well, we may have a hot time to-morrow."

As he spoke he turned aside from the downward trail, and led the way into a sort of cave in the side of a hill. It was large enough to accommodate all three of them, and allowed room in which to lie down, as they discovered by cautiously striking matches. Hank had indeed picked out a good place. It was protected from above by an overhanging ledge, and on one side there was a sheer descent of more than fifty feet to the bottom of the valley. Directly in front there was an open space, and a little way back from it a narrow, rocky defile so small that one man at a time could barely squeeze through.

"This makes it good for defense," observed Hank, as he laid aside his burdens. "If they should discover us, and take a notion to come at us, there are only two places we need to worry about. One is the way we came in, and that isn't going to let a whole lot of 'em rush along at once. Two of us can hold that. The other place is that rocky defile, and as only one man can get through at a time, one of us can look after that. They can't reach us from above; our back is secure, and the other side can look after itself. I think it's a pretty good bunk."

"So do I," agreed Blake.

"Do—do you think we'll have to fight?" asked Joe.

"We may have to," was the calm answer. "But I hope not. I want to see you boys get your pictures."

There was not much to do to prepare for the night. They spread their blankets on the floor of the cave and turned in, their weapons at hand, and the cameras and supplies piled to one side. So much had occurred in the last few hours, and so anxious were the boys about what might take place on the morrow, that Blake, at least, thought little of Joe's desire to locate his relatives. And Joe himself only recalled it with a start, after settling down for the night.

"I do hope, if we come out of this all right," he mused, "that I can locate my father."

The ghost dance was still kept up. The shouting rose to a climax, and the actions of the Indians, as the boys could note from their cave, were more and more fanatical, though all the details could not be observed, even though the moon was now high.

Then, in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings, they slept. Hank, ever a light slumberer, rose once or twice during the night to see if all was well, and found nothing suspicious. The boys were asleep, and the Indians had quieted down.

"But they'll be at it all the harder in the morning," murmured the cowboy.

Hank and the boys were awake early and made a hasty breakfast, albeit a cold one, even to coffee, for they did not want to betray their presence with a fire.

"They're getting ready to start again!" called Joe, as he took an observation after the meal. "Got the cameras ready, Blake?"

"I will have, in a minute," was the answer. "You had better manage one and I'll look after the other. I'll set the automatic off by itself and regulate it to go off at noon, when we're eating."

"And I'll do guard duty," added Hank, grimly.

With the dawn, Blake and Joe noted with satisfaction that their location for taking moving pictures could hardly have been bettered. They were comparatively near the middle of the valley, where the dances would take place; they were elevated, and they were well concealed by bushes growing in front of the cave. With the special attachments to their camera lenses, enabling long-distance pictures to be taken, they could get most excellent results.

"Well, here goes!" exclaimed Blake, as he set his camera, and focused it on the scene below. "I'm going to get some preliminary pictures as a sort of introduction," and he began grinding away at the handle, while Joe, pointing his machine at a different part of the scene, also began taking moving pictures of the Indians at their strange rites.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRISONERS

"Say, they're wilder than they were last night, Blake!"

"That's right, Joe. We didn't miss anything by waiting, even if we could have snapped 'em then!"

"Oh, you'll see some wild sights, all right," spoke the cowboy guide.

It was about an hour after the boys had first focused their cameras through the bushes on the Indians, and in that time the strange rites had proceeded rapidly. The lads had come out of the cave a little way, and were now perched, one on the edge of the abrupt descent, and the other where the narrow defile began, in order to get an unobstructed view. The automatic camera was off to one side, ready to operate.

So far as they could tell, they had not been observed, for, as Joe had said, the Indians seemed wilder than on the preceding night. They were

capering about, some circling great fires, others leaping about posts set in the ground, while some had a sort of tent, or bower, as their central point.

Of course the hour had not continuously been given to taking pictures. This would too soon have used up the films, so only what the boys considered the most interesting scenes were photographed. At times there would be a repetition of the ceremonies, different bands of Indians going through them in turn, and of course one series of pictures of each rite was enough.

Sometimes there would be nothing of interest taking place in front of Joe's camera, and he would have a resting spell, while, again, Blake would call out that he was going to put the cap on his lens and wait for something more sensational in the dance line.

"Well, I guess, after all, I was wrong about looking for trouble," observed Hank when noon came, and not a move had been made toward the cave where our friends were hidden. "These imps don't know we are here at all."

"And I think we've gotten ahead of Munson and his crowd," observed Blake. "I haven't been able to get a sight of him."

"Me either," said Joe. "But of course he may be hidden in some such place as we are."

"Yes, or he may be on the trail of the Navajos,

or some other band of these same Moquis," spoke Hank. "This is only a small part of the Indians that skipped from the reservations. It's about time, though, for Uncle Sam's troops to come along and drive 'em back."

"Do you think the soldiers will come?" asked Joe.

"Oh, sure," replied the cowboy. "These imps have had about all the fun they're entitled to. The Indian agents let 'em alone just so long, and then they make 'em hike back to the reservations."

"I guess they're going to stop to eat," remarked Blake, as he got up to take an observation. "Yes, that's what they're doing," he added. "I think I'll film their feast," and he did, by means of the automatic camera, though nothing of special interest took place at it.

In the afternoon, however, the redmen seemed to become wilder than ever. The character of the dances changed now, being more on the order of the war variety, though they were occasionally varied by ceremonies that seemed to be a sacrifice, or petition, for good crops. The names of the dances the boys could only guess at, though later they were given the proper titles by one of the government Indian agents.

"Say, they're getting ready for something special," exclaimed Joe a little later. "Look! the

whole crowd is getting together, and they're coming over this way!"

"I hope they haven't discovered us," remarked Blake.

"If they have——" began Hank, as he leaped to his feet and with ready rifle looked out through the bushes.

"No, they haven't seen us yet," he went on. "But there sure is something strange going on. See! they've got some of their number wrapped up in those cloths, and they're starting a fire on that pile of stones. I hope they're not going to make trouble with human beings—torture them, or anything like that."

"Do you think those are human beings?" asked Joe.

"They sure are—in those sacks, or wrappings," answered the cowboy.

Blake was industriously grinding away at the handle of his camera. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation:

"Oh, hang it all!"

"What's the matter?" cried Joe. "Did they see you?"

"No, but my film broke, and at such a time, too! Here, Joe, get your camera over here, and snap 'em until I can thread the film over again."

Joe did so, and only a few pictures were lost.

Hank and the boys were anxiously watching the Indians now, Blake having succeeded in getting his camera in working order again. It was very evident that some crowning feature of the strange rites was about to take place. The savages had built a big fire on a pile of rocks, and several of them now approached with queerly-shaped bundles, which were undoubtedly human beings swathed in cloths and skins. These poor creatures could be seen struggling to get away.

Suddenly, at a signal from their leader, the other redmen took off the wrappings. Blake and Joe, who were making pictures of all this, uttered startled cries.

"Look!" exclaimed Blake, horror-stricken. "It's Munson and his men the Indians have!"

"They've made prisoners of 'em!" added Joe. "And they're going to——"

"Not much! They're not going to do anything to 'em, boys!" cried Hank. "Those fellows may be your rivals, and your enemies, but they're white, and so are we, and those imps are Indians! Boys, we've got to save 'em even if we betray ourselves!" and he caught up his firearms.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TROOPS ARRIVE

Blake and Joe looked at their guide. His words had, for the moment, startled them, but they did not hesitate an instant after they gathered the import of what he had said.

Another look toward where the shouting, yelling, capering and frenzied Indians were circling about their intended victims told the two lads that they had not been mistaken. It was their rival, Munson, who had been caught—he and his men —and they were in sorry plight.

Their clothing was torn, and they were covered with cuts and bruises, which Blake made out through a pair of field glasses he caught up as soon as his suspicions were aroused.

"We can't let 'em torture those whites, even if they are your rivals, boys," went on Hank. "We've got to stick by our kind."

"That's right," admitted Blake. "Hand me my gun, Joe. Are we going to fire on 'em?"

"I think it's the only way to scare 'em off," replied Hank. "An unexpected fusillade of shots will paralyze 'em, and that will give Munson and his men a chance to break away. Then, too, the Indians may think the troops have come, and that's it all up with them, and they may scatter. Of course it's possible they may fight. We'll have to take chances. But we've got to fire on 'em!"

"To—to kill?" asked Joe in a low voice."

"No, just shoot over their heads. Let 'em hear the whine of the bullets, and that will answer as well—at least at first. Later on we may have to—but there's no use talking about that now."

"All right," said Blake. "Come on then," and he advanced with his weapon to get a clear aim.

"Wait a minute," suggested Hank. "No use of all three of us shooting at once. One of us can reserve his fire, and that one can just as well be taking moving pictures. You ought to get some mighty interesting ones when the shooting begins, and you don't want to lose your chance. Of course we may never get away with 'em, but——"

"Oh, pshaw!" laughed Blake, with a confidence he did not feel. "He's as bad as C. C.; isn't he, Joe?"

"That's right."

"I don't very well know who C. C. is," went on Hank; "but I guess I'll take back what I said. No use looking for trouble. Come on now, Joe, you and I will give these beggars a scare, while Blake twists the camera handle."

It was high time something was done if the white prisoners were to be saved, though from what fate the boys could not exactly determine. Whether the Indians merely meant to scare them with the prospect of some terrible fate, or whether they would torture them in the furtherance of some of their outlandish rites, could only be guessed at. But there was no doubting the terror of Munson and his three assistants. They were on the verge of despair.

"Are you all ready for the pictures, Blake?" called Hank.

"All ready."

"Then let's begin, Joe. By Jove! They're rushing the poor fellows right toward the blaze. Fire, Joe! Fire!"

The two rifles cracked out as one, and by working the magazine levers a fusillade of shots was poured toward the fanatical Indians, the bullets going close over their heads.

The effect was instantaneous. With yells of fright and surprise, the redmen holding their prisoners released them so suddenly that Mun-

son and the others fell to the ground. Then the savages, with one accord, leaped away from the rain of lead, which was harmless, though they did not know it.

"Getting the pictures, Blake?" yelled Hank.

"Sure!"

"Then here goes for some others. I'm going to call to those fellows to come to our cave!"

Leaping out in full view, on the ledge, while Joe ceased firing, the cowboy scout yelled:

"This way, Munson! This way! The moving picture boys are here, and we'll do our best to save you! Make for this cave!"

Munson and his men heard and understood. They leaped to their feet, took one look at Hank, who had now been joined by Joe, and started racing for the cave. Blake, not wanting to miss this chance for a rescue from the Indians, even though his rivals were the subjects, ground away at the camera handle.

Nearer and nearer to the slope that led through the rocky defile into the cave came the panting Munson and his helpers. As they reached it the Indians, seeming to recover from their fright, raced after their escaping captives.

"Here they come!" said Hank, grimly.

"Yes, and they've got their guns, too," added Joe. There were several puffs of smoke, and

sharp reports that told of weapons being used. Then something sang over Hank's head, pinging viciously on the rocks near his head.

"Get back in here!" he yelled, pulling Joe after him. "The hornets are out for business! They'll rush us next! Blake, I guess we'll need your help!"

"All right! As soon as I get a picture of this charge!"

On came Munson and the others. The Indians were close after them, and many of the redmen were now firing. But our friends were comparatively safe. Several times stray bullets sang uncomfortably close to Blake, but he pluckily stood his ground, getting picture after picture on the reel of the Indians madly racing to recapture their prisoners.

"In here!" yelled Hank, as Munson appeared at the rocky defile. "In here, all of you! It's safe for a time. Can you shoot?"

"A—a—little!" panted the rival picture man.

"Then grab up a revolver—give your men each one—there's plenty of ammunition. We'll stick to the guns."

Closely following Munson came his three helpers, panting from their run—dirty, wounded, and all but exhausted.

"Get in there!" yelled Hank. "We can hold 'em off—for a time!"

Eagerly the recent prisoners grabbed up the weapons. Blake, loath to give up such a splendid chance for pictures, was still at his camera.

"Get out of here, you beggars!" yelled Hank. An Indian had appeared at the opening between the rocks. Hank fired so close over the savage's head that the redman fell and rolled back, frightened but not hurt.

The shouts and frenzied yells of the redmen redoubled. They were firing wildly now, but most of their bullets were directed against the rocks.

"Give 'em a volley!" yelled Hank, and he and Joe, aided by the four refugees, sent back a hail of lead. It was aimed at the opening of the rocks, and some of the bullets must have gone through and found a mark, for yells of pain followed.

Then, at the trail by which the moving picture boys and Hank had entered the cave, there appeared a host of redmen. They gave a wild whoop.

"Repel boarders!" yelled Hank. "They're at us from both sides now! Divide your fire! Blake, you'll have to come!"

Blake gave a despairing look at the camera.

He wanted to film the wild and unusual scene going on before him, but he knew his aid was needed. He gave a last whirl to the handle, and was about to run back to the cave, when, above the shouts, yells, weird cries, and the cracking of the guns, there sounded the clear notes of a bugle blowing the charge.

"Hark!" cried Joe, stopping in the act of firing a gun.

"It's the troops! It's Uncle Sam's soldiers!" yelled Hank. "Boys, it's all right now! We're saved! The troops have come!"

Once again sounded the bugle. With their yells of anger and defiance changed to those of fear, the Indians turned back. They ceased firing, and their fanatical madness seemed to leave them.

Blake leaped back to his camera. Riding into the valley from the opposite direction than that which the boys had entered, was a troop of cavalry, their sabres glistening in the sun.

Once more the clear notes of the bugle were heard. The soldiers broke into a gallop, riding down on the band of Indians, who poured back from the slope toward the cave, and circled about the fire.

"Throw down your guns! Throw down your guns!" ordered the troop captain. "At 'em,

boys!" he called to his men. "Use the flat of your sabres! At 'em!"

And as the troopers, with defiant yells, charged down on the now slinking Indians, Blake took picture after picture of the inspiring and novel sight.

"Oh, if I only had his chance!" murmured Munson, regretfully.

CHAPTER XXV

SERGEANT DUNCAN

Soon it was all over, and without the necessity of inflicting anything more than corporal punishment on the Indians.

They were soon driven into a compact mass, their guns collected, and they were told to get ready at once to march back to their reservations.

"You got here just in time," said Hank, a little later, when the commander had sought out those whom he and his men had rescued in the nick of time. "A little more and I should have had to plug some of 'em."

"It's a good thing you didn't," replied Captain Marsh. "No use using harsh measures if you can help it. It makes trouble later. I fancy they've had a lesson. They do that regularly. But what are you doing here, anyhow?" and he looked curiously at the two lads.

"Making moving pictures," replied Blake; "and

I got a dandy film of that charge of you and your men."

"Good! I should like to see it. Say, but you've got pluck all right."

"That's what they have," put in Munson. "Well, boys," he went on, "you beat me out. I was making a try for some of these same Indian rite films, but I got careless. I went right into their camp, and they got mad. They took my machines away, smashed 'em to bits, made prisoners of us, and land knows what they were going to do to us when you stepped in. We're half dead. Been trussed up nearly a week now, knocked around, and half starved."

"The imps!" murmured Hank. "Here, boys, get some grub for this crowd." And thus Joe and Blake wreaked a novel revenge on their rivals. Munson felt it, too, for later he begged the forgiveness of the lads whom he had tried to circumvent.

"Well, I've got to look after my Indian wards," said Captain Marsh, a little later. "We'll have a bit of a rest, and then I'll escort 'em back to the reservations. It's the fifth band of 'em I've rounded up in the last few weeks. I heard this bunch was in this valley, and I tried to get here before, but the going was bad."

"I'm glad you came when you did," said Blake.

"I got about all the pictures I can take, but I thought I was going to lose them all. Now I'm ready to pack up and go back with the theatrical crowd." And he gave the officer a few particulars.

"What is it, Sergeant Duncan?" asked Captain Marsh, as one of the troopers came up.

"If you please, sir, Lieutenant Burke wants to know if the men shall dismount and have their rations?"

"Yes, Sergeant Duncan. I'll be there in a moment."

Joe, who had been helping Blake pack the cameras, looked up at the sound of that name.

"Sergeant Duncan!" he murmured. "I—I wonder if he can be—— Say!" he exclaimed impulsively, "my name is Duncan, sergeant—Joe Duncan. I've been looking for a relative—my father—I had a letter from Sam Reed. I—I——"

He faltered. The trooper wheeled sharply and looked at the lad.

"Are—are you Joe Duncan?" he asked.

"That's my name."

"Nate Duncan's son?"

"I don't know about that. I wish I did. Here is the letter I got," and Joe held out the odd document.

"Commissary's Christmas!" exclaimed the

sergeant. "It's the same one. Sam told me he was going to write. Boy!" he cried, "I'm not your father, but I'm your half-uncle—your father is my half-brother. I'm Bill—he's Nate; I remember now talking to Sam Reed about this, and telling how Nate was looking for his son Joe, who had disappeared. Boy, I'm glad I found you! This will do poor Nate good!"

"But where is he?" asked Joe, anxiously, while the others looked on in wonder.

"He's out in California—near San Francisco. I'm a sort of roving stone, myself. I never could settle down, and I don't believe I ever will. Your father was different. I had a letter from him only recently, just after I met Sam, and I had enlisted again. Yes, he's out in California, near the coast, and I can give you his address."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Joe, fervently. "I've found some of my folks at last!"

"Yes, and you'll find more," said the trooper. "It's providential the way we met, and I can put you in the way of soon meeting your father. He'll be wild to see you. I—I beg your pardon, Captain Marsh!" he added, turning to the commander. "This isn't—er—exactly discipline, but——"

"It's entirely excusable under the circumstances, Sergeant Duncan," replied the officer,

with a smile. "I will relieve you of duty for the remainder of the day, and you can tell Joe more about his father."

There is little more to be related in this book, though I have not by any means finished telling of the adventures of the moving picture boys. While the soldiers were getting ready to march the Indians back to the reservations, Blake and Hank got in shape for the trip to the ranch.

Joe and his uncle had a long talk, in which the lad learned how his father had gone off to try and better his fortunes and how, in that time, the lad had left the care of strangers, and made his way East ignorant of the fact that he had relatives. The soldier also related how he had mentioned to Sam Reed about the missing half-nephew, and afterward how, with his usual rolling-stone proclivities, he had enlisted to drive back the Indians to their reservations.

"And to think that, after all, I really have relatives," Joe exclaimed, as he gazed fondly at his uncle.

"And I suppose the next thing you'll do will be to look up your father," suggested Blake.

"That's what!" cried Joe. And how he did it, and how he and his chum had further adventures while taking moving pictures, will be related in the next book of this series, to be called: "The

Moving Picture Boys on the Coast; or, Showing Up the Perils of the Deep."

"Well, we had an exciting time," remarked Blake, as they were ready to get on the move once more.

"We sure did," agreed Joe; "and we got just the films we wanted, too. They ought to take the prize."

"They will," said Mr. Munson, "for you're the only ones who got any films. My trip failed, and the men of another concern I know of got afraid when they saw some of the savage dances, and they turned back. You'll get the prize all right." And the boys did, as you will learn later.

"Don't forget to write and let me know when you find your father, Joe," called Sergeant Duncan, as he rode off with his comrades behind the Indians.

"I'll write!" called Joe, and he and Blake waved a farewell to Captain Marsh. And thus, on their way back to the ranch and to rejoin their theatrical friends, we will, for a time, take leave of the moving picture boys.

THE END

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